

## **Collaborating with Nature: Reinterpreting Human Ecology**

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B.E. (Hons.), BFA, BFA (Hons., First Class)

“Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.”

“University of Tasmania”

June 2013

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## **Acknowledgements**

I am indebted to my supervisors Paul Zika and John Vella. Their support, suggestions and critical assessments throughout the duration of this project is greatly appreciated.

I would like to thank Andy Crawford of Southern Water for his assistance in sourcing information and maps relating to Hobart's drinking water catchment.

I would like to convey my deepest gratitude to my wife Margaret for her patience, understanding and encouragement. Thanks especially for your assistance with proof reading, exegesis formatting, and technical skills in preparing the digital artworks.

This exegesis is dedicated to the memory of my father,

Terry Chatwin (1946 – 2012).

## **Abstract**

This project investigates visual strategies for representing human ecology; the study of interrelationships between people and their environment. Motivated by the numerous human induced environmental issues confronting contemporary society, this research develops poetic reinterpretations of human ecology through metaphor, allusion and symbolism. The artworks operate in collaboration with nature, revealing hidden or obscured connections between artificial and natural elements to emphasise the inclusive relationship between society and nature. This strategy intentionally contrasts the often didactic and sensationalistic methodologies employed by scientific and governmental institutions in specific relation to environmental issues.

The development of the project is informed by Lucy Lippard's ideas relating to personal narrative and how this contributes to the transformation of anonymous 'space' into a familiar 'place'. Miwon Kwon's concept of the discursive site has motivated the creation of aesthetic strategies specifically directed towards prompting viewers to reconsider familiar ecological exchanges. This aspect of the project, supported by principles drawn from the field of ecological aesthetics, has facilitated the development of works embodying connections between society and nature.

Artistic responses consist of three distinct formal approaches: sculpture; site-specific installation; and multi-image digital projection. The sculptures juxtapose natural and artificial materials to reference and explore nature/culture interrelationships and processes. The site-specific installations further develop these ideas by directly engaging in situ features in order to reinterpret the operation of a local ecosystem. These installations also explore the interfaces between artificial and natural features in areas analogous to the peri-urban zone; locations where ecological complexity creates a particularly dynamic environment. The suite of digital work represents interactions between natural elements, the artist's home, and the artist, as a means to evaluate the potential for a personal human ecology to contribute to a broader environmental discourse.

These three divergent formal methodologies facilitate an assessment of their respective potential to embody and convey ecological considerations to viewers.

From this experience it is possible to identify the distinct characteristics and advantages in directly engaging features via interventions sited at the natural/artificial interface where the actual lived context provided by these in situ exchanges generates projects that reveal localised interaction's potential for prosaic ecological exploration. This research also contextualises the domestic environment as the basis for generating rich, novel and socially relevant ecological reinterpretations. In combination these phenomena contribute to the discourse relating to nature, culture and human ecology.

# Contents

Abstract.....	5
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	9
1.1 Formal and conceptual antecedents.....	9
1.2 Research methodology summary.....	10
Chapter 2: Sculptural works.....	23
2.1 <i>Balance</i> (2007).....	29
2.2 <i>Stand</i> (2007).....	35
2.3 <i>Plantation</i> (2007).....	38
2.4 <i>Mesh</i> (2008).....	40
2.4 <i>Machine</i> (2008).....	42
2.5 Coda.....	45
Chapter 3: Site-specific works.....	47
3.1 <i>Collaboration</i> (2007).....	47
3.2 <i>Rhizome</i> (2008).....	58
3.3 <i>Stick-out</i> (2008).....	70
3.4 <i>Welcome</i> (2008).....	79
3.5 <i>Catchment</i> (2008).....	84
Chapter 4: Domestic works.....	92
4.1 <i>Diversion</i> (2009) and <i>Every Drop Counts</i> (2009).....	96
4.2 <i>Reflection</i> (2008 – 2012).....	103
4.3 Other inside/outside interactions.....	111
4.3.1 <i>Connection</i> (2010).....	113
4.3.2 <i>Roof Garden</i> (2008 – 2011).....	115
4.3.3 <i>Helping Hand</i> (2010).....	118
4.4 <i>Whose Home is it? - Plot</i> (2012) and <i>Analogue</i> (2012).....	124
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	139
Appendices.....	147

Bibliography: Books .....	147
Bibliography: Websites.....	157
List of Figures .....	165
List of submitted works, in chronological order .....	173
DVD contents .....	174
Research activities .....	175



# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Formal and conceptual antecedents

My 2006 Honours project explored how art could be used to represent interactions between society and nature. This project, entitled *Natural and Domestic Plumbing: A Sculptural Connection* focused on developing hybrid forms by synthesising man-made objects, such as domestic plumbing hardware, with their natural analogues; tree branches and suckers.<sup>1</sup> These sculptures emphasised the functional similarities of trees and pipes in order to highlight how water, as a natural resource, links the natural and artificial environments in a reciprocal relationship.

The creation of 'binary' sculptures (employing essentially two materials) where manufactured materials were contextualised as a proxy for society, whilst the natural environment was represented by natural elements, evolved into a strategy for depicting inclusive relationships. An exemplar of this was *Symbiosis?*, a sculpture composed of a horizontal network of copper pipe and poplar suckers.



**Figure 1: *Symbiosis?*, 2006**

Although the form of *Symbiosis?* alluded to an inseparable relationship between society and nature, the title questioned whether this interaction was indeed mutually beneficial, inviting consideration of what advantage nature might derive from society. Despite this uncertainty *Symbiosis?* was not specifically

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<sup>1</sup> A sucker is a vertical shoot growing from the root system of a plant. These suckers appeared some distance from the main tree trunk and were the result of damage to the root system. *Encyclopaedia of Gardening*, Sydney: Reader's Digest, 1995, p. 42

intended to critique the human/nature relationship, but rather manifest literal and metaphoric connections.

I progressively became attracted to situations in the wider environment, 'natural' situations that highlighted interrelationships between society and nature. In these particular instances – seeing a plastic bag caught in tree branches, weathered glass amongst rocks on a beach, or pipes exposed by erosion – I observed poignant exchanges that appeared less contrived than my sculptures in establishing a tension between natural and artificial elements. Not only did these situations inform aesthetic strategies employed to create sculptures they also encouraged me to shift emphasis and explore interventions within the natural environment. As a result I created a number of speculative site-specific works by inserting plumbing hardware such as drain holes, taps and washing machine hoses, in and around natural water features. Echoing my studio based works, these in situ interventions were aimed at highlighting how water is a resource shared between nature and society. By engaging nature directly I became aware that a particular location could become a point of reference – tapped into (literally on occasions) by inserting recognisable items into an unfamiliar context. For me, this unconventional juxtaposition of object and location represented novel approaches to connecting people with the natural environment.

My Honours project had allowed me to gain a deeper appreciation for considering and representing interactions between society and nature. However on subsequently realising the potential contribution of a more comprehensive study, I was motivated to undertake this PhD project.

## **1.2 Research methodology summary**

This investigation focuses on exploring methods for representing interactions between society and nature (human ecology<sup>2</sup>) with an emphasis on highlighting their fundamental interconnectedness. To achieve an understanding of issues concerning the creative interpretation of human ecology it was important to

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<sup>2</sup> Human ecology is the study of interrelationships between humans and their environment. First use attributed to E. H. Richards (1907) in *Sanitation of daily life* (p V). Oxford University Press, "Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.utas.edu.au/view/Entry/89262?redirectedFrom=human+ecology#eid1124037> (accessed August 2007)

explore different aesthetic strategies across diverse contexts. Endeavouring to find a visual language, my responses progressed through three distinctly different approaches: sculpture; site-specific/site-responsive installations; and digital works derived from autobiographical experiences within my home. Works were also created for and displayed in a multitude of settings, including 'white cube' art galleries (as part of curated exhibitions), sculpture trails (located outdoors in public areas) and works developed from situations and interactions encountered within my home. This progression constitutes a personal journey, where each experience subsequently increased my appreciation for the complexity of human/nature interrelationships and how they could be creatively reinterpreted. I became aware of several categories of art practice relating to the representation of, and intervention with, the natural environment. It has been suggested that land art is the broadest of these categories and encompasses earthworks, ecological and environmental art.<sup>3</sup> My particular interest was the field of ecological art due to its specific focus on interrelationships. Indeed, ecological art has been described as a field that explores issues relating to "... sustainability, adaptability, interdependence, renewable resources, and biodiversity."<sup>4</sup>

Although my artistic responses were intended to convey an awareness of environmental issues, I also gained an appreciation of my own role as an ecological participant whose active involvement could be combined collaboratively with nature to produce creative reinterpretations. This situation reinforced the idea that nature is not something 'out there', something I can choose to remove myself from, but instead exists with me as a constant, palpable presence. Identifying an intrinsic connection to the natural environment could be interpreted as developing an *ecosophy*. *Ecosophy* is the personal interpretation and application of the principles of Deep Ecology as developed by the philosopher Arne Næss<sup>5</sup>. At its core Deep Ecology considers the welfare of non-human life-forms as being equal to that of humans. Despite this association, Næss' philosophy, though implicitly related to my research, is

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<sup>3</sup> Spaid, Sue, *Ecovention*, Cincinnati (OH): greenmuseum.org, The Contemporary Arts Center, ecoartspace, 2002, p. 10

<sup>4</sup> Kastner, Jeffrey, "Preface", in Kastner, Jeffrey (ed.), *Land and Environmental Art*, London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 2010, p. 12

<sup>5</sup> For more information see Næss, Arne, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long Range Ecology Movements", *Inquiry* (Oslo), No. 16, 1973, pp. 95-100

not discussed due to a decision to restrict my investigation specifically to interactions without considering the ethical consequences of the relationship that is human ecology. Additionally, I have deliberately limited my research methodology to one that highlights connections without referencing specific human induced environmental issues. This results in my artwork being motivated by a desire to generate appreciation and awareness for interconnections rather than one where explicit changes in lifestyle are promoted.

Through these experiences I became aware that the concept of nature – and the natural – can be contentious. The nature-art writer John Grande posits that “... we still cannot define what exactly nature is. It can be a word, a subject, an objective generalization, an issue or a state of being.”<sup>6</sup> While I acknowledge Grande's broad perspective on the subject, in the context of this project I have applied the philosopher Robert Elliot's definition of ‘natural’ to mean something unmodified by human activity.<sup>7</sup> This interpretation would inform the aesthetic basis for many of my artworks where the juxtaposition of natural with synthetic/artificial material was employed as a metaphor for interaction and exchange. Additionally, my selection of materials was informed by the artist/writer Tony Cragg who has suggested that materials with long cultural associations are interpreted differently to more recent artificially produced substances. With this in mind I chose to limit my range of materials to timber, stone and steel, while excluding more contemporary substances such as plastic.

Tasmania has been the location of numerous high profile environmental protests. Particularly notable examples were protests motivated by the decision to flood Lake Pedder, the proposed construction of the Gordon below Franklin Dam, and more recently the ongoing debate over old growth logging. Contrasting this overt activism my aesthetic methodology has focused on presenting interactions from a poetic perspective; to highlight interconnectedness without resorting to value judgements that appportion right and wrong.

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<sup>6</sup> Grande, John K., *Balance: Art and Nature*, New York: Black Rose Books Ltd., 1994, pp. 191-192

<sup>7</sup> Elliot, Robert, “Faking Nature”, in Pojman, Louis P. (ed.), *Environmental Ethics - Readings in Theory and Application* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition), California: Wadsworth Thomson, 2001, p. 229

By engaging poetic interpretations my strategy operates in contradistinction to the didactic or argumentative strategies employed by science, politics and some artists. Also contrasting my approach is the work of Mark Dion who, as a high profile artist, addresses ecological issues by preferencing scientific techniques. Although Dion applies scientific methodologies to create his works, he is also acutely aware of art's capacity to introduce representational and conceptual devices that are foreign to science and thereby have the potential to question existing paradigms. With respect to this Dion has acknowledged that "[t]hey [scientists] don't have access to the rich set of tools, like irony, allegory and humour, which are the meat and potatoes of art and literature."<sup>8</sup> My incorporation of similar strategies as the formal foundations for artworks included: equating a flat, uniform surface finish to artificial processing; the creation of a functional relationship between trees and pipes to highlight ecological connections; or using the concept of support as a metaphor to represent interrelationships.

My research suggests the majority of mainstream public commentary addressing environmental issues comes from either a political or scientific perspective.<sup>9</sup> Whilst not denying the relevance of this approach, a degree of sensationalism appears to accompany the presentation of select information. Writer and curator Stephanie Smith has raised similar concerns regarding the quality of content when environmental issues are presented in the popular media, referring to the hyped treatment of some issues as "... 'green porn': sexy but superficial environmentalism."<sup>10</sup> Despite its potential to reach large audiences, she questions whether this method is conducive to producing a sustained and meaningful debate. Smith has also expressed concerns regarding methods used to address environmental issues within the visual arts. In response, she has called for a sustained and sincere exploration of the issues to

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<sup>8</sup> *PressPLAY Contemporary Artists in Conversation*, Miwon Kwon interview with Mark Dion, London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 2005, p. 125

<sup>9</sup> Using the website news.com.au to search for the phrases "environmental art" and "ecological art" within the period January 1990 to October 2012 in the publications *The Daily Telegraph*, *Herald Sun*, *The Courier-Mail*, *Adelaide Now*, *The Australian* and *Perth Now* returned 4 and 0 results respectively. In contrast searching for articles containing either the words "environmental" or "ecological" over the same period returned 10,049 and 787 results respectively. While not all of these articles referred specifically to either a political or scientific context a significant amount did. See news.com.au, "news.com.au – advanced search", News Limited, <http://search.news.com.au/advanced///?us=ndmnews&sid=2&as=NEWS>

<sup>10</sup> Smith, Stephanie, "Weather Systems: Questions About Art and Climate Change", in *Weather Report: Art and Climate Change*, Boulder (CO): Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007, p. 14

prevent the possibility of only “... providing a palliative to ourselves and to our audience without contributing much to artistic production, nuanced debate, or lasting social change.”<sup>11</sup> Reflecting on these thoughts I was content to address human ecology without responding to specific environmental issues. Instead I treated ecological content in a generalised manner, preferring to reference the necessity for balance when consuming natural resources, or emphasising how these resources are converted into products, or society's production of waste. More speculative works incorporated specifically scientific aspects when alluding to the conversion of natural materials into products.<sup>12</sup>

Despite not referencing specific environmental issues artworks alluded to problematic situations resulting from human ecology. These were referenced as a subjective, poetic dimension that ‘invited’ viewers to consider personal interpretations of the nature/culture dialectic with such readings constituting a communication between myself and the public – a group of individuals. Consequently this methodology also had the potential to create relationships between the personal and the public domains by incorporating conceptual elements that could be associated with each context.

Authors including Rachel Carson (*Silent Spring*, 2002), James Lovelock (*Gaia*, 2000) and Stephan Harding (*Animate Earth*, 2006) who emphasise the innate connectedness of society and nature have informed my appreciation of human ecology.<sup>13</sup> This inclusivity has been colourfully expressed by the philosopher and scholar Marshall McLuhan who commented, “[t]here are no passengers on Spaceship Earth. We are all the crew.”<sup>14</sup> However rather than impacting on my practice in a purely positive sense, the vast range of potential ideas and interactions constituting human ecology created a predicament; a dilemma stemming from my initial inability to isolate particular exchanges from the general milieu and respond. To address this issue I chose to focus specifically on trees and exchanges resulting from their incorporation into the built

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> This refers specifically to experimental ecology's use of semi-permeable barriers to manipulate interactions between species.

<sup>13</sup> For further reading see Carson, Rachel, *Silent Spring*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002; Lovelock, James, *Gaia - A new look at Life on Earth*, Oxford (UK): Oxford University Press, 2000; Harding, Stephan, *Animate Earth - Science, Intuition and Gaia*, Dartington (England): Green Books Ltd., 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Attributed to Marshall McLuhan in 1964. From Lapham, Lewis. H (ed.), *Lapham's Quarterly - Book of Nature*, Vol. 1 No. 3, 2008, p. 115

environment. Walking along Hobart's urban streets, the ordered placement of trees became a key point of reference that highlighted the city's order in contrast to the nature surrounding it. This aspect was in turn emphasised by the dichotomy between the organic shape of trees and the linear geometry of buildings. I became intrigued by the way small pockets of vegetation are integrated, consciously or not, into the built environment. Although I frequently saw these verdant oases as an exercise in tokenism, an attempt to 'soften' the cityscape by contrasting the apparent solidity and permanence of constructed surfaces, they provided an opportunity for me to observe how the dynamism inherent in a tree's growth affects the surrounding built environment.

As many of my sculptural works focused on society's conversion of natural resources I found John Grande's critique of similar works by other artists interesting.<sup>15</sup> Despite overtly referencing unsustainable resource consumption, Grande questions these works' ability to establish a reconciliation between society and nature. Additionally, Grande suggests that works made solely from unmodified natural materials, despite emphasising a respect for nature, can have difficulty engaging environmental issues from a social perspective. For me, two words in particular resonated from this assessment: 'reconnect' and 'involved', and I subsequently became interested in exploring how these aspects could be incorporated into my work. Simultaneously, reviewing my photographic documentation of nature/culture exchanges, I realised these images were highlighting issues of interconnectedness with a subtlety and poignancy that contrasted with my locationally disconnected sculptures. These realisations motivated a change in strategy designed to engage interactions directly, in situ, via site-specific installations.

In addition to its site-specificity, *Collaboration* represented an increase in scale, an aspect intended to literally include viewers in the work by surrounding them in an immersive environment. This aspect was informed by the writing of Andrew Causey who distinguishes between installations and environments by suggesting that the latter incorporates the audience.<sup>16</sup> The writing of Adam

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<sup>15</sup> Grande, John K., 1994, p. 9

<sup>16</sup> Causey, Andrew, *Sculpture Since 1945*, Oxford (UK): Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 104

Geczy and Benjamin Genocchio<sup>17</sup> also assisted in developing my appreciation of how an installation oriented art practice operates by embracing its surroundings. In this context *Collaboration* is a key work as it retained formal aspects related to previous sculptures – specifically the methodology of combining natural and artificial elements – while also responding directly to its location. However unlike subsequent installations this work was exhibited indoors within a formal gallery setting.

A series of public outdoor exhibition opportunities enabled me to investigate a range of interfaces between natural and artificial elements in situ, while continuing to preference poetic interpretations to emphasise genuine interconnections. I was attracted to these sites as they represented a hybrid of natural and artificial elements, echoing my earlier sculptural works, and additionally embodied dynamic situations that I could engage directly. These installations were also located in areas not traditionally associated with the presentation of art, which provided the opportunity to evaluate and experience how these surroundings could contribute conceptually to the work's reception; a process informed by my surveys of the peri-urban zone surrounding Hobart. Gradually I also realised that analogues of the peri-urban could exist at smaller scales in areas immediately surrounding isolated buildings, artificial ponds and the vegetated strip adjacent to urban rivulets.

*Rhizome's* location on the Hobart Rivulet was an opportunity to develop a creative response where exchanges between competing natural and artificial aspects were accentuated. It was therefore appropriate that *Rhizome's* form constituted a metaphoric bridge between existing natural and artificial elements. This formal thematic reappeared in other site-specific installations - *Stick-out* (construction 1), *Stick-out* (construction 2), *Welcome* and *Catchment* – to constitute responses that literally bridged their respective micro peri-urbans. This symbolic gesture was intended to mediate between the built and natural context in a manner that invited viewers to reinterpret the in situ human ecology.

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<sup>17</sup> In their Introduction to the book *What Is Installation? An Anthology of Writing on Australian Installation Art*, Sydney: Power Publications, 2001



Miwon Kwon's concept of site multiplicity influenced my formal approach to developing and presenting site-specific installations. Kwon interpreted the 'site' for site-specific works as being a combination of the physical site, institutional site and discursive site.<sup>18</sup> My intention was to explore strategies that would emphasise a discursive site. This was primarily achieved by incorporating ubiquitous elements, such as stormwater pipe outlets, tree stumps, dams, roofing iron and PVC pipe, with the intention of prompting viewers to experience familiar features from alternative perspectives.

An appreciation of ecological aesthetics guided my creative responses to observed interactions. Central to the concept of ecological aesthetics is the development of a formal response designed to highlight connections between nature and society, specifically to generate awareness regarding a particular issue.<sup>19</sup> Practically, *Collaboration* and *Rhizome* achieved this by emphasising the functional association between pipes and trees, as artificial and natural conduits, to highlight society and nature's inclusive relationship. Additionally, *Rhizome* also compared the spread of certain plant species with development's reliance on subterranean pipes ('roots') for expansion. *Stick-out* (construction 1 and 2) and *Welcome* differed from other works as they focused on highlighting 'removed' elements by creating an ecological aesthetic based on 'restoration'. Central to this formal response was the creation of architectural interpretations for the removed casuarina saplings that were 'rebuilt' on the remaining stumps. The interpretation of these works was informed by Robert Smithson's writing relating to the re-mediation of disused mining sites. The core consideration of Smithson's methodology was to directly address and reassess problematic relationships and contexts rather than employing art to 'gloss' over the negative environmental impacts of human activity.

Water's ubiquitous presence and central role in sustaining all life became relevant to large-scale issues<sup>20</sup> and localised initiatives near my home.<sup>21</sup> This

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<sup>18</sup> Kwon, Miwon, *One Place After Another - Site-Specificity and Locational Identity*, Cambridge, (MA): The MIT Press, 2002, p. 30

<sup>19</sup> Erzen, Jale, "Ecology, art, ecological aesthetics", in Strelow, Heike (ed.), *Ecological Aesthetics - Art in Environmental Design: Theory and Practice*, Berlin: Birkhäuser, 2004, p. 22

<sup>20</sup> A particular concurrent example was a severe drought affecting many major Australian population centres.

<sup>21</sup> This relates specifically to public campaigns by the Hobart City Council to encourage efficient water use and reduce the level of aquatic pollution.

ability to connect regional areas with broader contexts prompted me to consider water as a material well suited to highlight connections between society and nature. Water's ecological importance also results in its inclusion in many ecoventions.<sup>22</sup> Studying ecoventions gave me an appreciation for art's capacity to create public awareness while also practically assisting to alleviate ecological issues. Of my installations, only *Catchment* could claim to incorporate any practical capacity as it supplemented the natural water supply to a small pond. Although *Catchment* served to collect and deliver only a small amount of rain water, its use of corrugated roofing iron to create oversized eucalypt 'leaves' alluded to the operational perspective of both roofs and vegetation as novel water catchments. This poetic interpretation contrasted with the frequently didactic presentation of ecoventions, a result of their necessity to actually work.

In *The Lure of the Local* writer/curator Lucy Lippard discusses processes whereby generic and anonymous 'space' can become imbued with meaning to create a 'place'. The surveys I was conducting, both in conjunction with installations and otherwise, were having a similar affect, particularly when they were undertaken whilst developing an exhibition proposal. Focusing specifically on interactions between society and nature in frequently unfamiliar locations allowed me to simultaneously develop a personal narrative. Creating this 'story' was significant as it would influence formal responses for communicating ecological awareness to viewers.

After participating in a number of curated site-specific exhibitions I realised that a lack of opportunity to develop subsequent works incorporating in situ information was a limitation. This aspect, together with a recognition that many of my materials alluded to a domestic context, prompted a shift to concentrate on how my interaction with natural elements is mediated by my home. By incorporating autobiographical references I was directly acknowledging my role as an ecological participant while also suggesting to viewers that they are similarly connected. This change in context was also a response to John Grande's suggestion that focusing on local environmental features can be an

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<sup>22</sup> An *ecovention* is a portmanteau derived by combining the words ecology and intervention. *Ecoventions* are characterised by their intention to employ inventive strategies to transform locations ecologically.

advantageous way for artists to explore society's relationship to nature. Grande specifically cited combining creative responses with direct experience as a way to respect regional diversity while emphasising relevant ecological features to local audiences.<sup>23</sup> The act of directly engaging a location is a position that Lippard takes to differentiate between generic space and the familiarity of place.<sup>24</sup> From Lippard's perspective my experience and intimate knowledge of my home resulted in it constituting the *acme* of 'places'.

Focusing on my domestic ecology motivated me to research other artists who had also used their own homes for artistic interventions – most prominently David Ireland, Gregor Scheider and Jean Pierre Raynauld. These artists were primarily interested in exploring how they and others interact with, and are influenced by, the interior architecture of their modified homes. Rather than pointing out connections between the interior of their respective homes and external influences they were more concerned with its relative isolation. In contrast, authors including Henry David Thoreau (*Walden*, 1987), Robert Finch (*Outlands*, 1986 and *Death of a Hornet*, 2001), Annie Dillard (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, 1974), Henry Beston (*The Outermost House*, 1992) and Gerrard Durrell (*My Family and Other Animals*, 2008 and *Birds, Beasts and Relatives*, 1971) provided me with an appreciation for observing my local interactions by reading their experiences mediated either through or around their respective dwellings. Additionally the ecologist Jennifer Owen's revealing 30 year study into the biodiversity of her suburban backyard (*Wildlife of a Garden, a Thirty Year Study*, 2010), together with writer Hannah Holmes' insight into the flora and fauna around her own home, as detailed in her book *Suburban Safari – A Year on the Lawn* (2005), inspired me to explore the lives of insects and spiders within my own home.

*Catchment's* use of corrugated roofing iron, demonstrated to me that building roofs can be interpreted as artificial analogues for naturally occurring topography, as they both similarly collect and direct rainfall. This association motivated the development of *Diversion*, a structure aimed at redirecting rain from the exterior to the interior of my home, enabling this water to provide

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<sup>23</sup> Grande, John K., 1994, p. 36

<sup>24</sup> Lippard, Lucy, *Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered World*, New York: The New Press, 1997, p. 281

amenity. Despite focusing on similar conceptual territory to *Catchment*, *Diversion*'s location within the privacy of my home meant its presence and operation was intended primarily – unlike previous public installations – to increase self-awareness and appreciation. Despite this reflexivity, the shift in context was given wider social currency in terms of its relationship to the high amount of potable water used within Australian homes, and the 'waste' of virtually all stormwater within the suburban context.

Unlike sculptures and public installations where viewers could interact with the works themselves to develop a discursive site, works within my home, due to their private location, required methods for recording and representing their content for display within a public location. Consequently, whereas documentation *had* informed the development of sculptures and site-specific installations, works exploring interactions between my home, myself and nature would rely specifically *on* documentation to generate awareness in viewers when represented within a gallery space. As a result, still digital images and digital video would not only record situations but would constitute the work. Presentation strategies for works focusing on my home were informed by Lippard who suggests that a multiple image format can be an effective way to convey a sense of place when the content has been removed from its original context.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, the artist Olafur Eliasson's documentation of his urban intervention *Erosion* (1997) made me aware that my interaction, particularly with water delivered by *Diversion*, implicated me as a performer and that my actions themselves could be used to compose a creative response.

I saw similarities between my focus on domestic water use and the artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles' concentration on rubbish production, collection and disposal. I was particularly attracted to the way Ukeles uses rubbish to reveal the operation of an urban system with an omni-presence and reliability that can result in its contribution being overlooked. Similarly, *Reflection*'s use of water from a reticulated supply, like Ukeles' *Flow City* (1983), was intended to highlight how reliance on a system can link individuals to form a community.

I became aware that works examining exchanges, particularly those creating connections between my home's interior and exterior, constituted a form of

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 180

remapping as they equated activities occurring in one location with another. However unlike geographical maps, these relationships were not concerned with physical characteristics per se. Instead they had more in common with geographer William Bunge's "oughtness maps"<sup>26</sup> that were intended primarily to affect change by revealing novel associations rather than detailing the specifics of geographical features as represented in conventional cartography. I was also motivated by Bunge's interest in subjective interpretations based on an individual's perspective, rather than the development of general consensus as to the 'truth' of a particular association. This position informs the development of my works for exhibition, as they effectively represent 'maps' that each viewer can reinterpret and apply to their own lives.

Interpreting relationships between myself and nature, within my home, was informed by the work and writings of Austrian artist Friedensreich Hundertwasser.<sup>27</sup> In particular I found his 'five skins' concept particularly relevant, especially the first three of these – epidermis, clothes and house – that represented the 'skins' involved in the interactions occurring within my home.<sup>28</sup> I was also attracted to Hundertwasser as he considered the relationship between nature and society as inclusive – a philosophy emphasised by his proposal *First Draft of Tree Tenets* (1973). I also became interested in the installations of artist Lynne Hull who similarly highlights an innate connection between nature and society. Her practice is concerned with the design of elements aimed specifically for use by target animal species that have been affected by human induced habitat destruction. Although her practice mirrored aspects of my relationship with micro-fauna in my home, in my case these diminutive creatures made *themselves* at home rather than having one constructed specifically for them.

Mark Dion's survey of fauna and flora replicating scientific methods became a point of comparison for the study of micro-fauna within my home. Although focusing on similar content Dion's systematic surveys contrasted with my

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<sup>26</sup> See Wood, Dennis, *The Power of Maps*, London: The Guildford Press, 1992, p. 189

<sup>27</sup> See Restany, Pierre, Hundertwasser – The Painter King with Five Skins, Hong Kong: Taschen, 2003 and Hundertwasser, Friedensreich, "Your Window Right – Your Tree Duty", The Hundertwasser Non Profit Organisation, <http://www.hundertwasser.com/text/view-1.3.2.7> (accessed July 2012)

<sup>28</sup> The fourth 'skin' consists of cultural identity while the fifth relates to global ecology.

opportunistic approach when documenting micro-fauna in situ. The form of my projections *Plot* and *Analogue* was informed by Dion's display methodologies, specifically the methods Dion employs to emphasise biological diversity in his surveys including *Roundup: An Entomological Endeavour for the Smart Museum of Art* (2000) or *A Meter of Meadow* (1995). Perhaps most significantly, Dion made me aware that in alluding to an ecology's original context I could allow viewers the opportunity to reinterpret my representations via fusing their own personal narratives with the work's content.

The following three chapters follow the sequence outlined in this introduction.

## Chapter 2: Sculptural works

Interactions between nature and the built environment are central inspirations. In particular, I am attracted to situations where overlaps occur between the natural and artificial, and the hybrid environments that develop over time through a layering of cause and effect. These locations frequently emphasise the conflicting requirements of nature, whose actions are bound by 'natural' laws, and society's use of engineered artifice to redirect and control.<sup>1</sup> Whilst these forms of interaction are not new, a raft of contemporary environmental issues provide a current social context to scrutinise and mediate these relationships from a novel perspective.

Static constructions within the built environment limit wild nature's tendency to grow and transgress boundaries.<sup>2</sup> Conspicuous and common examples of nature breaching these limits are roots from specimen trees<sup>3</sup> deforming asphalt paths and concrete gutters.



**Figure 1: Tree and streetscape in Hobart.**

In Hobart I have witnessed instances where the level of disruption requires an offending tree to be removed, only to be replaced with one of the same species.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In his book *The Control of Nature*, John McPhee researches three case studies to detail how human intervention has modified the progression of natural processes. Central to McPhee's discussion is the unpredictability of nature's responses in the face of artificial interruption.

<sup>2</sup> For further reading refer to Weisman, Alan, *The World Without us*, London: Picador, 2008. By combining aspects of science with speculation Weisman discusses the potential consequences for the built environment if humanity suddenly disappeared. Without a human population, Weisman argues much of society's artificial infrastructure would deteriorate significantly within only a few decades to be reclaimed by nature.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'specimen tree' refers specifically to isolated, individual trees surrounded by the built environment, typically beside roads. These trees are also *specimens* in the sense that they represent a sample of nature.

<sup>4</sup> These are commonly species of alder, or London Plane Trees.

These events cause me to empathise with nature, as it is the limited and myopic view of society and its needs that have cost the tree its life. Indeed, my observations suggest that at the time of removal these trees are actually thriving; and yet for performing their task *par excellence* and providing a verdant, fecund oasis amid a sea of man-made sterility, they are efficiently deleted.

Many of my observations have focused on trees as their longevity and relatively large scale result in prominent interactions with the built environment that can last for many decades. While tree trunks increase in girth the crowns simultaneously grow upwards, creating a situation where interactions with their immediate surroundings can be repeatedly curtailed by human intervention. Perhaps ironically, this has the effect of visually reinforcing any process employed to maintain separation between a tree and development. A prime example of this are the forms of trees planted below electrical power lines where regular pruning causes them to assume unusual shapes, or plants positioned close to roads where they can be 'trimmed' by passing traffic.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 2: Trimmed specimen tree.**

Conversely, there are also examples of buildings that are designed specifically to accommodate specimen trees. In North Sydney the awnings of many buildings are constructed with bespoke cut-outs allowing trees to grow vertically without extensive pruning.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This is more common in rural areas where less scheduled maintenance is performed and shrubs are more likely to grow close to narrow roads.

<sup>6</sup> These awnings are structurally substantial, being constructed from steel and glass rather than more flimsy and flexible materials such as canvas.





**Figure 3: Trees missing awning cut-outs in North Sydney.**

Natural processes of growth, perhaps motivated by a search for more light, at times produce a comic, anti-conformist effect, as the tree trunks frequently grow away from the building, thereby completely missing the cut-outs and negating any accommodations made for them.

In addition to examining interactions between built and natural elements within the established urban landscape, I also travelled to areas of new development on the suburban fringe; situations that sit at opposing ends of the human ecology spectrum. In the urban case, wild nature is often in the minority, existing only in small pockets, while areas of new development regularly displace relatively wild nature, and are frequently bounded by areas that have undergone little man-made intervention. In observing and documenting the early stages of this 'sprawl-in-progress' I was able to see and appreciate the amount of infrastructure required to support the inhabitants of yet-to-be-built houses. This interested me as the networks of pipes and wires, largely hidden from view in completed developments, constitute a form of ecological denial by minimising visual reminders of society's connection to the wider environment. As the architectural designer Lars Lerup states from a North American perspective:

Here in [suburbia]... production is kept at bay, many clicks away. Veggies from California, steaks from Chicago... water from Colorado, all come

mysteriously to the unknowing via faucets, pumps, supermarkets shelves, cans...<sup>7</sup>

This methodology orchestrated to minimise the visual presence of amenities contrasts with the visibility of services that support the *Centre Georges Pompidou* (1977) designed by Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers. Here the building's interior was designed to be free from pipes and ducting so the building services were collected on the exterior surface. The architects have commented that “[s]ince we had to show these functions, we decided to do it in a colourful way.”<sup>8</sup> Such an approach interests me as it emphasises the range and complexity of services whilst alluding to exchanges between buildings and their surrounds. This codified approach also parallels modern domestic plumbing systems where pipes are coloured to denote function.<sup>9</sup> However whereas the *Pompidou* deliberately exploits the consequence of a functional imperative to create a decorative statement, the colour coded piping employed in contemporary domestic plumbing is typically hidden from sight removing the potential for it to convey ongoing awareness or information.



**Figure 4: Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers,  
*The Centre Georges Pompidou*, 1977.**

I typically visited areas of new development on the suburban fringe, on weekends when workers were absent. Without through roads or buildings, these areas also tended to be free of people in general. This solitude combined

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<sup>7</sup> Berger, Alan, *Drosscape: Wasting Land in Urban America*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, p. 243

<sup>8</sup> *On Tour with Renzo Piano*, London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 2004, p. 9

<sup>9</sup> PE-X Yorkflex tube is used in conjunction with Sharkbite plumbing fittings. Colour coded as: mustard - potable water, red - hot water, lilac - recycled water, green - rain water. Reliance Worldwide, “PE - X Product Range”, Reliance Worldwide <http://www.sharkbite.com.au> (accessed October 2011)

with the incomplete infrastructure combined to produce an unexpected affect; a feeling of being in the middle of an art installation where the isolated artificial forms became abstracted into impromptu sculptures. I was reminded of Tony Smith and his recollection and interpretation vis-à-vis art, of travelling down a recently completed but still closed New Jersey Turnpike.

The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never done... It seemed that there had been a reality there which had not had any expression in art.<sup>10</sup>

At the limits of suburbia there was a palpable sensation that a series of wondrous natural/artificial 'Frankenstein-like' hybrids could spring forth from voids between yet-to-be-developed nature and incomplete development. This tension caused the natural to become hyper-real; the curvaceousness of a tree appearing almost alien, detached from reality, when juxtaposed with the linearity and uniformity of artificial features.

The tension between the artificial and natural was most pronounced where development terminated abruptly – where built elements ceased in a manner that could be extended at a later date. At these partially completed points eroded soil and rocks washed in and onto concrete gutters and asphalt roads, and the disturbed surrounding soil became an ideal habitat for opportunistic weeds.



**Figure 5 and 6: Debris in uncompleted gutter (left), and eroded soil.**

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<sup>10</sup> Harrison, Charles, and Wood, Paul (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Malden (MA): Blackwell Publishers, 2003, p. 760. Originally published as Wagstaff Jr, Samuel J., "Talking with Tony Smith", *Artforum*, Vol. 1, No. 4, December 1966, pp. 16-18.

The exchanges within these areas caused an ecologically rich transitional zone, whose interactions became a fertile area for inspiration.

Although the specifics of these exchanges varied between locations they collectively represented informal 'systems' combining natural and artificial protagonists. As my intention was to develop a visual methodology using object-based sculpture, this systematisation presented as a formal challenge.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, especially as I saw the *art* as being experiential and intrinsically linked to in situ interactions, I came to question art's ability to respond in an echo of concerns raised by the sociologist Jacques Leenhardt:

Objects of ecological aesthetics are not permitted small frames of reference if they are to contain the mechanisms of action and reaction between man and nature. And that is why the work of art... can sometimes be in danger of substituting itself for the processes, and thus concealing them. Hence ecological art should reflect very thoroughly about the concept of the art object.<sup>12</sup>

My decision to use sculpture as a mechanism for representing these interactions was motivated by a desire to make objects that people could walk around and experience within a neutral gallery space. I wanted to develop sculptures that were formally uncomplicated, contrasting with the *real world* interactions that inspired their creation. In deliberately employing simple strategies to create these works I wanted them to operate as 'seeds'; metaphorically embedding themselves into the memory of viewers to be recalled at the moment when similar *real world* interactions were encountered. In this way my sculptures could act as mnemonic triggers for reverie, providing the viewer with an opportunity to reinterpret familiar situations and achieve a deeper understanding and appreciation for the exchanges they embodied.

Kwon has identified ecological issues as an area where art can use social contexts to initiate activism. She also acknowledges that in many instances the contribution of creative works lies within a range of cultural responses opposed

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<sup>11</sup> I use the term *sculpture* to denote self-contained works. Although they allude to situations or relationships they do not form a physical connection with any specific location.

<sup>12</sup> Interview between Jacques Leenhardt and Herman Prigann, "Ecological aesthetics or aesthetic ecology", in Strelow, Heike (ed.) 2004, p. 112

to specifically displaying an obvious political dimension.<sup>13</sup> Although it is possible to see each of these situations as representing political positions, I interpreted the primary difference as relating to a distinction between the 'activism' being latent or overt. In this context my intention was to place works firmly within the latent category, to enable the works to operate more in the vein of local residents discretely removing weeds and replacing them with indigenous flora, than a high profile public rally protesting against environmental issues. Additionally, despite focusing on topics that can often polarise opinions and create interpretations attributing right and wrong, I sought to develop a value neutral aesthetic that highlighted associations through poetic strategies to emphasise nature and society's inclusive relationship without judgment. In this way, my intention was to avoid a situation identified by Lippard where environmental or ecological art unintentionally manifests as an agitprop.<sup>14</sup>

Despite Lippard's concern relating to ecological art as a form of propaganda, my initial concerns were associated with a desire to respond creatively to the complex situations I was seeing and experiencing. Context, as Leenhardt observed in his aforementioned quote, was critical to representing human ecology; however the richness and layering of interactions became problematic in relation to considering aesthetic strategies. The diversity and interconnectedness of in situ interactions made it difficult to isolate a single relationship and represent this sculpturally. Consequently I decided to apply greater specificity by selecting particular interactions as a focus.

## **2.1 Balance (2007)**

Fences are emblematic of development; their presence becomes a physical barrier that controls as they divide space into discrete areas and denote diverse uses and users. Lippard asserts that "[t]he fence remains the most salient symbol of the European notion of private property..."<sup>15</sup> I found interactions occurring directly along fence lines to be rich with potential, particularly situations where trees and fences combined to create a tension that resulted

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<sup>13</sup> Kwon, Miwon, 2002, p. 24

<sup>14</sup> Lippard, Lucy, "Weather Report: Expecting the Unexpected", in *Weather Report: Art and Climate Change*, Boulder (CO): Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007, p. 6

<sup>15</sup> Lippard, Lucy, 1997, p. 132

from the amalgamation of a static fence and moving, growing plant. I appreciated that as these plants grew they would gradually disrupt the fence's structure, thereby subverting its function by reducing its ability to segregate and support itself. These instances became metaphors for other situations where society and nature interact in an oppositional, if not contradictory, manner.

Interactions between fences and trees tended to fall into one of two categories. Firstly, there were those resulting from trees planted too close to fences.



**Figure 7: Tree damaged fence.**

Here, as the tree grew, it pushed with increasing force against the fence causing ongoing damage. For me this exemplified the tension when nature and society exist *too* closely, where conflicting requirements for resources cause the natural elements to compromise the artificial. The way these trees, while continuing to grow and disrupt, had their form in turn modified by the fence's presence, was also of interest. The artist Zoe Leonard has photographed similar situations. Her *Tree + Fence, out my back window* (1998) vividly depicts a tree grotesquely squeezing around and through gaps in a chain mesh fence, having outgrown its 'allocated' space.





**Figure 8: Zoe Leonard, *Tree + Fence, out my back window*, 1998.**

Unlike timber fences where growing plants force apart and damage elements, the greater strength of steel causes trees to grow around metal components as though they are attempting to absorb the obstruction. These scenes and encounters remind me of a self-inflicted, as opposed to societally driven outcome. Contrasting with Leonard's images are the second type of fence/tree encounter; situations where fence construction has been adjusted to accommodate the trunk or limbs of a tree.



**Figure 9: Conciliation in suburban Brisbane.**

These instances generate a sensation of reconciliation; a form of negotiation has occurred as the fence maintains its functionality and structural integrity, while the tree remains intact and is given freedom to grow. Here the formal contrast between fence and tree creates a tree that is more *treelike* – it *becomes* the archetypal tree; while the fence becomes an exemplar of all fences. It is only in these situations, where fences are designed with the deliberate intention to include the tree, that I experience this affect. Through a compromise between

segregation and inclusion, humanity's intrinsic and immutable connection to nature becomes apparent, as does the requirement to often invest more time and resources to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome.

The work *Balance* was a sculptural response to interactions I had seen between fences and trees. Composed of a dead eucalypt limb positioned opposite a treated pine picket fence these two elements were connected by a pair of small square frames.



Figure 10 and 11: *Balance* (front view, left) and (rear view, right), 2007.

I saw the picket fence as a metaphor for the conversion (by society) of wild nature into a civilised form. Although the tree limb's embodiment of organic growth represented the fence's antithesis, rather than being an extraneous inclusion it is required as structural support to literally balance the fence. Indeed, by editing the limb's base to make it deliberately unstable, *Balance* attempted to visually emphasise the inclusive association between society and nature. Despite *Balance* referring specifically to localised interactions, its concept of inclusiveness could also be interpreted as a reference to the balance that exists *naturally* within the Earth's ecosystem in a process known as dynamic equilibrium.<sup>16</sup>

I initially saw my deliberate introduction of instability, by cutting the limb's base at an angle, as producing a situation where mutual support in the form of a

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<sup>16</sup> Swanage, Maureen (ed.), *Environmental Science*, Canberra: Australian Academy of Science, 1994, p. 188. The recent phenomenon of anthropogenic climate change has the potential to disrupt the operation of ecological feedback loops and cause imbalances.



'helping' embrace could occur. However in light of John Grande's statement regarding humanity's tendency to see itself inappropriately as the primary constituent in the nature/culture dialectic, I thought it necessary to reinterpret *Balance's* aesthetics.<sup>17</sup> If the limb had been self-supporting then the relationship in *Balance* could have been interpreted as one where society, represented by the picket fence, is literally propped up. This situation would have referred to how the natural environment is ultimately the source for all resources. Instead the limb's instability came to symbolise society's ability to affect and alter nature, implying that nature requires society to conduct itself in a responsible manner. In this context, the term 'balance' also refers to a balancing of society's needs against the potential consequences brought about by intervening indiscriminately in the natural environment.

By constructing the fence from *Pinus radiata* (an introduced plantation grown species) and juxtaposing it with an indigenous eucalyptus limb, I was able to conceptually reference ideas regarding indigenous verses introduced species. Similarly, I saw the *weed-like* potential of *Pinus radiata*<sup>18</sup> mirrored in the tendency for man-made development to spread indiscriminately, displacing native flora and fauna in the process. It was not my intention, however, that development be interpreted per se, as a weed. Rather, I sought to convey an understanding that society by its very presence influences nature, exchanges that are not necessarily a negative condition but simply a *natural* consequence of our existence.

Interrelationships between nature and society were further highlighted by the physical connection between the limb and fence rails. Rather than the limb being attached to either the inside or outside of the rails it was positioned in line. As such the limb, as manifested by trees growing through fences, or tree roots cracking asphalt surfaces, disrupted the continuity of the rails, alluding to the disruption caused by wild nature within the built environment. The interaction between the rails and limb also brought to mind situations I had observed while walking on the suburban fringe, such as fencing wire wound

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<sup>17</sup> Grande, John K., 1994, p. 8

<sup>18</sup> *Pinus radiata* is considered a potential weed. Australian Government - Land and Water Australia, "Pinus radiata in bushland: Assessing the issue in the Green Triangle", Australian Government, <http://lwa.gov.au/projects/2586> (accessed January 2009)

around tree trunks employing them as improvised posts. Here, as the trunk expanded, the wire would cut into the bark, potentially ringbarking the tree and causing it to die.<sup>19</sup> This was yet another example of the literal and metaphorical tension between society and nature that stems from relatively unremarkable interactions. In another particular instance a tree had been used as the support for a gate.



**Figure 12: Tree used as an improvised gate post.**

Although attracted to the *make-do* aesthetic, what most captivated me was the way the tree had been pruned; only those parts that were useful remained whilst any superfluous material had been removed. This provided the inspiration for terminating the limb's branches in *Balance* with flat, cross-cut truncations.<sup>20</sup> In this way the limb also became stylised as an essence or idea of a tree literally 'standing in' for nature. This formal treatment also mirrored the pickets' aesthetic, their austere forms becoming a proxy for development and society.

*Balance* distinguished itself from other early object based works as it was formally complete. I was satisfied that the interplay between form, content and scale was resolved and represented the concepts I was seeking to address. In contrast many other works of this period were speculative and experimental;

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<sup>19</sup> Ringbarking cuts off the supply of nutrients from the roots to the crown and occurs because the only living tissue in a tree trunk is the sapwood, a relatively narrow band of cells found directly under the bark. See Kollman, Franz and Côté, Wilfred, *Principles of Wood Science and Technology Volume I: Solid Wood*, Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1984, p. 4

<sup>20</sup> Coincidentally, I later read about the drastic pruning used by citrus farmers in Victoria to minimise water use during the prolonged drought. These pruned trees had a similar truncated appearance to the eucalypt branches I was using. Wahlquist, Asa, "Growers resort to cruellest cut to survive", *The Weekend Australian*, September 8-9, 2007, p. 3

uncomplicated and spontaneous. Like *Balance*, other sculptures created during the initial stages of this research incorporated a combination of natural and artificial materials, allowing me to further explore ideas relating to the nature/culture dialectic.

## **2.2 Stand (2007)**

Comparing the fence and limb in *Balance* I realised that both elements were made from timber. However whereas the pickets were made from timber with roughly uniform dimensions, in contrast the limb was irregularly shaped, the result of an interplay between natural growth characteristics and natural phenomena such as wind, access to sunlight and local topography. Although the timber forming the pickets was also once part of a tree, the pickets themselves are the result of a manufacturing process – a procedure I interpreted as quantifying nature. Considering this difference prompted me to see surface finish and uniformity as metaphors for the conversion of natural resources into artificial materials. Although such processes are central to the relationship between human development and nature, Tony Cragg has questioned the acceleration of this in the modern era.

We consume, populating our environment with more and more objects, with no chance of understanding the making processes because we specialize, specialize in the production, but not the consumption.<sup>21</sup>

Cragg implies that we as a society develop new products at such a rate that the opportunity to consider and understand the ecological implications of our actions is limited. This situation has also been discussed by the design critic Ezio Manzini, who developed the concept of 'semiotic pollution' to represent the proliferation of devices and objects.<sup>22</sup> Manzini, like Cragg, suggests the rate of new products in combination with a limited life-span (the result of built-in obsolescence) has resulted in a situation where products can possess little or no meaning. This can create a society where there is a tendency to become complacent regarding our relationship with the natural environment vis-à-vis

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<sup>21</sup> Wilmes, Ulrich (ed.), *Anthony Cragg: Material, Object, Form*, Osfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 1998, p. 57

<sup>22</sup> Ramakers, Renny, "Spirit of the Nineties", in Ramakers, Renny and Bakker, Gijs (eds.), *Droog Design: Spirit of the Nineties*, Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1998, p. 37

the supply of raw materials. Cragg also suggests that our familiarity with certain naturally occurring materials creates a psychological connection that is absent when modern artificial substances such as plastic are considered.<sup>23</sup> Motivated by this idea I conscientiously limited my selection of materials to timber, stone and steel – as an affirmation of humanity's long and intimate association with these elements.<sup>24</sup>

Addressing society's 'quantification' of natural resources *Stand* was my idea of how a tree might look if reinterpreted architecturally. I chose the title due its double meaning that simultaneously referenced a device to provide structural support and a group of trees. These forms were also inspired by architectural features I had seen attached to newly constructed houses in areas devoid of any substantial vegetation.<sup>25</sup>



**Figure 13 and 14: Architectural appendages (left), and *Stand*, 2007.**

Although these space-frame structures did provide the amenity of supporting small second story balconies, in the absence of significant trees or shrubs, I saw their primary role as architectural substitutes for the removed vegetation. This association was reinforced by the tree-branch-like complexity of the structure's frame in comparison with the block-like houses.

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<sup>23</sup> Wilmes, Ulrich (ed.), 1998, p. 57

<sup>24</sup> The selection of materials for *Balance* was more pragmatic as suburban fences are frequently made from treated pine palings.

<sup>25</sup> This was encountered in the suburb of Kingston, south of Hobart.

Formally, *Stand* was composed of two distinct parts; a rectilinear frame fabricated from dressed<sup>26</sup> eucalypt sticks and a 'cap' of dead eucalypt leaves. Squashing these leaves between layers of timber alluded to similar interactions between fences and trees, while the manner of presenting a square of leaves atop the eucalypt sticks became reminiscent of a garland or crown, a 'prize' obtained via the considered and mutually beneficial amalgamation of society (as represented by the dressed sticks) with nature (as represented by the leaves).

By using perfectly straight and uniform elements as substitute 'trunks' and 'limbs', this representation existed as the antithesis of naturally occurring tree shapes. My linear portrayal of trees also contrasted with tree-like sculptures by artist Roxy Paine, whose work has been credited with "... resolv[ing] the tension between nature and technology by discovering in them a common dependence on systems and patterns."<sup>27</sup> Such a shared reliance on organisation emphasises the inclusive relationship linking nature and society. For me, this was highlighted through the form of Paine's 'trees' alluding to how manufacturers source natural materials from numerous locations, processing them via industrial systems to create a finished article; a process represented in *Palimpsest* (2004) via the accumulative progression through twig, branch to trunk. Additionally, the formal similarity between actual trees and *Palimpsest* alludes to the use of technology to replicate or augment natural systems. Whilst the durability of *Palimpsest*'s stainless steel frame suggests that synthetic materials possess the ability to outperform natural substances.



Figure 15: Roxy Paine, *Palimpsest*, 2004.

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<sup>26</sup> 'Dressed' refers to timber that has had its surfaces machined uniformly flat and smooth.

<sup>27</sup> Heartney, Eleanor, *Roxy Paine*, Berlin: Prestel Verlag, 2009, p. 23

In an analogous fashion, my intention with *Stand* was to highlight how society converts natural resources (real trees) into timber products, implying that human intervention can improve the performance and efficiency of natural materials. While *Stand* does not literally achieve this in a functional sense, its artificial redesign of a natural item does draw inspiration from current attempts to assist natural processes. A relevant example is the development of synthetic trees designed to remove more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than actual trees, and in the process reduce the effects of human-induced global warming.<sup>28</sup>

### 2.3 *Plantation* (2007)



Figure 16: *Plantation*, 2007.

*Plantation*, like *Stand*, is a sculpture designed<sup>29</sup> to reference society's conversion of natural resources into artificial products. The title refers to the source of the raw materials and the similar grid arrangement shared by trees in plantations and buildings in population centres. Reflecting on this aspect, *Plantation's* square shape became a metaphor for the geometric order imposed on natural landscapes. This analogy becomes heightened as small dressed pine boards are joined to create a 'city-scape'. These miniature 'skyscrapers' rise into the air, their forms alluding to the defensive walls of a castle, representing civilisation's apparent desire to either eliminate nature or keep natural elements under control.

These 'buildings' have as their 'foundation' small diameter radiata pine logs that precisely mirror the above cityscape's 'footprint'. By using an arrangement

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<sup>28</sup> Bentley, Molley, "Synthetic Trees Could Purify Air", British Broadcasting Corporation, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/2784227.stm> (accessed June 2009)

<sup>29</sup> The use of the term *design here* denotes deliberate formal considerations aimed at connecting aspects of sculptures to real world situations.

where a natural material literally supports a manufactured product my intention was to emphasise that, despite being largely excluded from the built environment, nature remains the source of all raw materials employed during construction. I used the altered appearance of the same material (radiata pine) as a metaphor for the application of manufacturing processes to refine natural materials; with the round, irregular and rough surface of the logs contrasting with the square, uniform and smooth appearance of the blocks above. Unlike the logs, the block's regularity allowed them to be placed adjacent to each other without any gaps – a reference to actual city blocks where buildings are constructed to maximise the efficient use of available space.

*Plantation* advanced ideas introduced in *Stand* as it included a third element – waste. Manufacturing processes inevitably produce waste and these by-products are responsible for many environmental issues facing society. In contrast, nature does not produce waste; instead the output from one process becomes the input for another.<sup>30</sup> When dressing the pine blocks for *Plantation* wood shavings were collected and used to fill the interior space, creating a 'mountain' of waste reminiscent of the vast amounts of rubbish placed in landfills. However in contrast to landfills, where rubbish is removed to locations on the fringe of population centres, the centrally positioned 'waste' in *Plantation* becomes the focus for a metaphorical city.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles has made human garbage the focus of her practice. Since 1977 she has been "... the unsalaried, official Artist-in-Residence for the New York Department of Sanitation..."<sup>31</sup> Despite waste being a common theme in both *Plantation* and Ukeles' practice, her methodology for addressing this topic lies in stark contrast to my approach. Ukeles works in a high profile public manner seeking to directly engage with those who either produce or collect the waste. A particular example is *The social mirror* (1983), where Ukeles veneered the sides of a New York garbage truck with a reflective surface, allowing members of the public to literally *reflect* on their personal contribution to the city's rubbish. In contrast I used metaphor to conceptually link the waste generated while making *Plantation* with the rubbish generated by society.

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<sup>30</sup> McDonough, William and Braungart, Michael, *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*, New York: North Point Press, 2002, p. 92

<sup>31</sup> Spaid, Sue, 2002, p. 92

To highlight the waste component I disrupted the continuity of the perimeter wall by leaving a narrow vertical gap (located centrally along one side) to emphasise the interior's contents. In doing this the waste becomes more clearly visible, while also encouraging the shavings to spill through the gap onto the gallery floor. Allowing the shavings to move outside the perimeter of the work (beyond the wall) disrupted the sculpture's square footprint, suggesting waste can accumulate to levels where it transgresses defined areas to affect the wider ecosystem. This exchange references bioaccumulation or biomagnification; terms that refer to thresholds beyond which the effects of poisoning become noticeable – a phenomenon responsible for widespread poisoning by chemicals once considered safe.<sup>32</sup> Within ecosystems, all living organisms are involved in interactions with their external environment in order to access sources of energy.<sup>33</sup> By including a gap in *Plantation's* 'wall' and enabling exchanges between the interior and exterior, *Plantation* alludes to, and acknowledges, the 'open' operation of actual ecological systems.

## 2.4 Mesh (2008)

In addition to *Balance*, *Stand* and *Plantation*, a series of works including the sculpture *Mesh* were developed to highlight human ecology by referencing methods used during field work in the discipline of experimental ecology.<sup>34</sup> I was prompted to incorporate aspects of apparatus used in ecological experiments as these devices provide a physical barrier between predators and prey, a situation that for me echoes the segregation caused and embodied by fences. Cages also interested me in particular as they filter naturally occurring interactions, while representing an intentional intervention and manipulation of nature by humans for the purposes of increasing knowledge.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See Carson, Rachel, 2002, Chapter 3, "Elixirs of death", pp. 15 - 38

<sup>33</sup> Swanage, Maureen (ed.), 1994, p. 13

<sup>34</sup> Experimental ecology concerns the manipulation of organisms or their habitat to investigate factors affecting population size and distribution. Answers Corporation, "experimental ecology", Answers Corporation, <http://www.answers.com/topic/experimental-ecology> (accessed March 2012)

<sup>35</sup> I was similarly attempting to gain and convey to an audience insights into ecological interactions – specifically human ecology – however rather than resorting to the didacticism explicit in scientific experiments and representations, I sought to develop responses driven by metaphor, symbolism and allusion.





**Figure 17: Cages on rocks separating fauna during an experiment.**

Using my fabricated cages to 'filter' became a metaphor for artificial industrial processes where human intervention converts raw materials into usable products. More literally, the cage in *Mesh* acted to conceptually link the role played by manufacturing processes to remove impurities or unwanted material when converting raw materials to finished products. Additionally, the artificial regularity represented by the gridded mesh – itself a manufactured product – alludes to the straight-line geometry of many manufactured items whilst referencing the frequently linear urban road and fence networks; features that highlight society's desire to order nature in an efficient manner.

While previous works used an *implied* 'filter' to highlight human ecology through the conversion of natural materials to artificial products, *Mesh* engaged the 'filter' as an integral formal aspect. By using the grid-like mesh as a template, irregularly shaped branches were converted into dimensioned sticks, an overt reference to the refinement or machining of natural resources.



**Figure 18: *Mesh*, 2008.**

Unlike *Plantation*, there was no intention to include the portion of wood eliminated as waste within the sculpture as I considered this too literal an approach, especially when the item performing the conversion (the mesh) was so readily apparent.

In *Mesh's* material relationship my intention was for the mesh to serve as a question, inviting the viewer to consider society's use of natural resources. I developed a number of diverse formal permutations, all incorporating steel mesh, in an attempt to further explore how this 'questioning' aspect could be emphasised. During this process however, I realised the term 'mesh' also applied to the operation of machines (i.e. where gears mesh) and more generally the act of engaging with others. I also realised the verb iteration of mesh could describe interactions between society and the natural environment. Reflecting on this, the central concept behind *Machine* (the next sculpture I will introduce) materialised.

## 2.4 *Machine* (2008)



**Figure 19: *Machine*, 2008.**

*Machine* represented the continuing search for material combinations aimed at highlighting connections between society and nature, while drawing attention to the dual object and process meaning of the term 'machine'. This represented a development from previous works that singularly focused on the process of converting natural resources into usable products. Unlike previous sculptures *Machine* also investigated the possibility of simultaneously referencing the

actual machines used to transform natural resources and the process of conversion itself. This was achieved by juxtaposing natural and manufactured materials – all derived primarily from trees – to construct a form that alluded to gear trains commonly found in machinery.<sup>36</sup> However, rather than referring to modern technology, the aesthetic was more reminiscent of medieval machinery designed to harness wind or water power. This primitive aspect has certain formal connections with the work of artist Martin Puryear whose predominantly wooden sculpture often incorporates tree branches or weathered timber in combination with machined timber elements. Additionally, like *Machine*, Puryear's sculptures frequently allude to an unspecified functional dimension. Indeed it has been said that Puryear's "... evocative, dreamlike explorations in abstract forms retain vestigial elements of utility from everyday objects found in the world."<sup>37</sup>



**Figure 20: Martin Puryear, *Desire*, 1981.**

Although Puryear's work is not typically associated with ecological issues, his work *Desire* (1981), a large spoked wheel connected via a shaft through its hub to a central pillar, could be seen as a reference to industry's reliance on the natural environment and perhaps alludes to an actual desire to break free from this association. This reading is emphasised by the wheel being forced to maintain an implied circular motion, a feature I interpreted as representing nature's ability to ultimately dictate society's progress owing to it being the source of all raw material. Additionally, the monumental scale of the 'wheel' in *Desire* embodies a potent symbol representing society's efforts – through

<sup>36</sup> A gear train is a series of gears used to transmit power from one shaft to another. Gear trains are commonly used in gearboxes and gear driven clocks.

<sup>37</sup> Art 21 Inc, "Martin Puryear", Art 21 Inc, <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/martin-puryear> (accessed February 2012)

technology – to harness and control the natural environment. However, Puryear's selection of timber – a culturally ancient material – to construct *Desire* could be interpreted as suggesting that contemporary society's attitude towards nature has failed to progress in relation with other areas of technological advancement.

*Desire's* enigmatic function is echoed in the complexity of the human/nature relationship that remains difficult to fully understand and appreciate. This sentiment is similarly reflected in *Machine*, where forms reference mechanical parts without an implied, familiar and/or useful function, whilst the juxtaposition of natural with artificial materials reinforces the complicated though inseparable human/nature relationship.

The association between form and content in *Machine* is assisted via the weathered minimalist look of the eucalypt branches that possess an almost industrial aesthetic. Their silver-grey colouration was combined with a smooth surface to recall steel shafts used for transmitting power within machinery. The selection of these branches demonstrates the consideration required when choosing suitable materials.<sup>38</sup> With this in mind, the only modification made to the branches was to truncate the ends by producing flat perpendicular faces.

*Machine* differed from previous works as it combined three materials as opposed to two, and included recycled materials as an intentional and considered element.<sup>39</sup> I decided to utilise discarded packing material because, like the natural materials, they were freely available. However this decision also allowed me to reference society's consumption of natural resources without incorporating any actual products per se, as the packaging material (from cardboard boxes and wooden crates) implied the storage and transportation of unspecified but completed goods. The 'gears', made from strips of cardboard box wound around the eucalypt branches, became a metaphor for the 'wheels of industry'. The salvaged pine frames held the branches in a manacle-like grip, highlighting a tendency for humanity to harness nature and then support it

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<sup>38</sup> As I only wanted to 'minimally' alter the natural materials it was important the branches did not require the removal of any smaller branches or loose bark, that would have revealed areas of new (and differently coloured) surface.

<sup>39</sup> Prior to *Machine* new materials were purchased and used to create components for sculptures.

artificially. In this instance however, the machine does not work, the gears do not engage and the 'shafts' will not turn. This lack of kinetic motion in a form usually associated with movement was for me a way of questioning society's interaction with the natural environment – particularly the way we as humans make use of natural resources and our ultimate dependence on them. Another development was the intuitive manner employed during the fabrication of *Machine*; for rather than imposing my intentions on the materials to realise a preconceived design (as in previous works) the form of *Machine* developed organically in response to the shape of the branches.<sup>40</sup> This process resulted from the non-uniformity of the eucalypt branches and made me aware that I could establish a 'conversation' with materials; collaborating with 'irregularities' as tools to directly inform the final composition.

## 2.5 Coda

Lucy Lippard curator of *Weather Report: Art and Climate Change* has expressed reservations regarding environmental art's capacity per se to significantly contribute to changing public attitudes and perceptions, as framed by the current environmental debate. Rather, she sees art's role as being analogous to a cultural 'grease' that facilitates interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration, connecting with audiences on a poetic level to affect an emotional response.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, the writer, art critic and lecturer John Grande, in his introduction to *Balance: Art and Nature*, addresses what he sees as potential limitations for two different modes of environmentally related art practice. The first mode relates to artists who seek to highlight interactions between humans and the natural environment from the perspective of society's excessive resource usage, with Grande citing Tony Cragg, Bill Woodrow, David Mach and Richard Deacon as examples. Grande questions whether their allusion to overproduction and consumption alone are effective in reconciling society and nature, stating; "... their work does nothing to reconnect us with nature: it merely reaffirms the syntax of the industrial product."<sup>42</sup> Grande also addresses what he see as limitations for environmental artists who operate at the other end of the

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<sup>40</sup> The designer/artist Ron Arad has defined design as "...the act of one imposing one's will on materials...". See *Ron Arad Talks to Mathew Collins*, London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 2004, p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Lippard, Lucy, "Weather Report: Expecting the Unexpected", in *Weather Report: Art and Climate Change*, Boulder (CO): Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007, p.6

<sup>42</sup> Grande, John K., 1994, p. 1

spectrum – those who preference assemblages of natural materials. Artists such as “... David Nash, Karen McKoy, Andy Goldsworthy, Giuliano Mauri, Jane Balsgaard, Lars Viks and Nils Udo...”<sup>43</sup> who use natural materials in relatively remote locations. Though this methodology of art practice is thoughtful and sensitive towards nature, Grande asks; “... [though] these works may present themselves as ecologically sensitized, how socially involved is this new vision?”<sup>44</sup>

Although this assessment can be viewed as simplistic and potentially dated,<sup>45</sup> I saw Grande's evaluation as an opportunity for self-reflection. Through this process I realised the emphasis of my sculptures had shifted from focusing on interactions between nature and society to one where the conversion of natural resources into artificial products had become the central thematic. Despite this shift I did not necessarily see a problem, vis-à-vis Grande's position on those artists who critique consumption. My works sought to focus on the dynamic *interactive* and thereby ecological aspect of this process, rather than pointing solely to the unnatural magnitude of society's conversion of resources. Additionally I saw my sculptures as operating in contrast to those of artists such as Cragg and Woodrow, especially due to my considered synthesis of natural and artificial elements to emphasise the inclusive relationship (as dialectic) between nature and society. Despite challenging Grande's critique of the aforementioned representational methodologies, his use of the words 'reconnect' and 'involved' inspired me to reflect on additional methodologies for representing and reinterpreting the nature/society dichotomy.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 3

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> *Balance: Art and Nature* was published in 1994.

## Chapter 3: Site-specific works

### 3.1 *Collaboration* (2007)



**Figure 1: *Collaboration* (detail), 2007.**

Although my sculptures were suggestive of interactions between society and nature, Grande's assessment prompted me to explore how site-specific installations could address the subject of human ecology via their physical *connection* with site. As site-specific works establish "... an inextricable, indivisible relationship..."<sup>1</sup> between work and location, I saw this capacity for context to frame and support conceptual development and premise, as representing a significant advantage over object-based sculptures. *Collaboration* was an installation that responded explicitly to the architectural features of a gallery space interior. The *Lounge Gallery* of Entrepôt Gallery at the Tasmanian School of Art is a challenging space, as the gallery's small scale combined with the large wall of windows along one side, makes the volume reminiscent of a fish tank. Additionally, features such as storage cupboards intruding into the space, a broken security camera hanging high on a wall, together with other various anomalies create an environment that is far from neutral. Whilst these visual distractions could become an issue for self-contained artworks, applying a site-specific methodology allowed me to embrace some of these 'undesirable' intrusions. One particular feature was a short length of PVC pipe that protruded from the concrete floor. The incongruity of this element piqued my curiosity, provoking me to ask "Why is it there? Where does it go?" and ultimately (as I had used pipes in previous work during Honours) "What can I do with it?"

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<sup>1</sup> Kwon, Miwon, 2002, p. 12



**Figure 2: Detail of PVC pipe extending from Entrepôt Gallery floor.**

I imagined this short length of pipe to be the only visible sign of an extensive network; a hidden system of pipes that spread beneath my feet. Being unable to see where this network went created a sense of mystery and tension that inspired me to mentally excavate and map the pipe's path. Peering into the pipe, I was met with a black void that added to this sense of enigma. This resistance to investigation made me even more determined to highlight its presence by including the pipe in my response. The sensation of being both aware but simultaneously uncertain about the properties and potential of the pipe reminded me of sci-fi movies including *The Blob* or *Alien* where the respective creature travels through ducting to avoid detection. I wondered if an unknown occupant might similarly be lurking out-of-sight using the security afforded by the underground network and appear unexpectedly at the pipe's mouth. Returning to reality I interpreted the hidden system attached to this pipe as embodying unseen connections between society and nature. This situation prompted me to recall the still visible infrastructure of pipes I had viewed within new suburban developments and how these would be rendered invisible; covered over and hidden from sight like the network connected to the pipe outlet within the gallery. The contradictory situation embodied by these unseen presences – being hidden but nonetheless related – inspired me to investigate a natural and man-made relationship to highlight the 'obscured' and 'reconnect' the seemingly disconnected.

Constructed from a combination of similar materials, *Collaboration* borrowed formally and conceptually from sculptural works developed during my Honours



project.<sup>2</sup> However, despite these similarities *Collaboration* represented a development in the two key areas of site-specificity and scale.

*Collaboration* was site-specific as it directly incorporated aspects of the gallery by using the in situ PVC pipe and existing architecture as physical points of reference. This created an indistinct edge, making it difficult to differentiate precisely between the installation's limits and its surroundings, as the installation was able to implicitly expand to include the building around the assemblage. This blending of work and site to produce an inclusive aesthetic allowed me to emphasise and develop conceptual aspects. A parallel situation is discussed by Adam Geczy and Benjamin Genocchio in the introduction to their book *What is Installation?* where they consider this 'activation' – the creation of a relationship between the assemblage and surrounding space – as a central attribute of Installation Art.<sup>3</sup> In this context carefully selecting which, and how, pre-existing items were used to link *Collaboration* with the gallery space assisted the generation of relevant and sympathetic relations. In developing this intimate exchange – between assemblage, location and audience – my intention was to address Lucy Lippard's concern that many contemporary site/place-specific installations fail to develop a meaningful connection with their site.<sup>4</sup>

Aiding these connections was the second area of development, an increase in scale. By making a larger work the audience was able to enter and walk through the assemblage of trees and pipes. This created an immersive environment where the audience and work were no longer separated – instead they became 'architecturally' integrated. By establishing a relationship between the audience, assemblage and space, where it was possible for viewers to physically move through the installation, their encounter became an experiential one. My intention was to use this experiential aspect as a device to assist in raising a deeper level of awareness by encouraging viewers to spend a greater amount of time with the work. This increased duration was driven by the gradual revealing

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<sup>2</sup> This was based on the conceptual affinity between trees and pipes caused by their capacity to transport fluid and resulted in them being interpreted as natural and artificial conduits respectively. During Honours I used this association to develop sculptures that were assemblages of copper pipe and tree suckers (see Chapter 1 - Introduction for more detail).

<sup>3</sup> Geczy, Adam and Genocchio, Benjamin, "Introduction - What is Installation?", in Geczy, Adam and Genocchio, Benjamin (eds.) *What is Installation? An Anthology of Writings on Australian Installations Art*, Sydney: Power Publications, 2001, p. 2

<sup>4</sup> Lippard, Lucy, 1997, p. 20

of certain aspects – such as the relationship between the PVC pipes and poplar tree trunks, and the methods used to connect the assemblage to the site.



**Figure 3: Windows allowing a view of *Collaboration* without entering the gallery space.**

Having viewers engage with the installation's space is the means by which the art historian Andrew Causey differentiates between installations and environments. Causey's assessment is that "... 'installations' differ from 'environments' in that they do not assume the presence of the audience within the work of art..."<sup>5</sup> Applying this line of thinking, *Collaboration* became an artwork that could operate either as an installation *or* environment contingent on whether the viewer was inside (part of the work) or outside the gallery space (viewing the work from a distance). This situation was facilitated by the large wall of windows that made it possible for viewers to see the assemblage, and the associated connections with the building, without sharing its immediate space. I came to see these modes of engagement as being ecologically analogous to active participation and passive observation. However the physical connections and relationship between *Collaboration* and the building itself suggested, despite being beyond the installation (outside the gallery space), viewers still remained within its environment by virtue of the building's status as an extension of the assemblage. The assemblage's permeations into its surroundings were important for the work's interpretation as they reflected the propagation of effects from exchanges that occur within an actual ecology.

By metaphorically comparing *Collaboration's* activation of its surrounds to similar 'non-art installation' situations, I became aware of previously unrealised connections and relationships; specifically how underground pipes act as 'roots'

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<sup>5</sup> Causey, Andrew, 1998, p. 104

to connect buildings. Additionally I appreciated how the interaction of diverse aspects within the built environment could constitute an analogue of the exchanges occurring within flora and fauna based ecologies. This ability and desire for an installation to invite a reinterpretation of the familiar is echoed in Antony Gormley's comments regarding his *Event Horizon* (2007) project in New York:

The field of the installation should have no defined edges, and [make] people more aware of their own environment... What matters is the way the sculptures infect the collective space of the city... and how their [the inhabitant's] perception of their environment changes as a result of these foreign bodies.<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 4: Antony Gormley, *Event Horizon*, 2007.**

With this in mind, I realised the potential for *Collaboration* to also act as a catalyst for allowing viewers to reassess their surrounds from a different perspective through my creation of an alternative context within a specific location.

The Lounge Gallery's compact scale allowed me to easily fill the space and develop an interactive viewer/assemblage environment. By carefully arranging the PVC pipes and tree trunks, I also enabled viewers to move relatively unimpeded throughout the gallery, encouraging them to view *Collaboration* from different perspectives. By experiencing *Collaboration* from varying points, different aspects of the installation were highlighted allowing the viewer to gradually develop an appreciation for the various concepts and relationships represented. This interaction could be compared to a 'journey'; a process that Geczy and Genocchio refer to "... as an activation of space which takes into

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<sup>6</sup> De Jongh, Karlyn, 'Conversation with Antony Gormley - Being the Void', *Sculpture*, Vol. 29 No. 2, March 2010, pp. 26-31

account the subjective, temporal specificity of the beholder.”<sup>7</sup> The duration of this interaction also allows for the development of what Michael Fried referred to as 'theatricality'.<sup>8</sup>

Although Fried's application of the 'theatre' concept (as it applied specifically to the exhibition and reception of Minimalist sculpture) was intended as a pejorative assessment, it was nonetheless relevant in describing how I intended the viewer to interact with *Collaboration*. Indeed, Kwon in *One Place After Another* takes Fried's concept of theatricality a step further by suggesting that many site-specific projects employ a methodology of dematerialisation where the “... 'work' no longer seeks to be a noun/object but a verb/process, provoking the viewers' critical (not just physical) acuity...”<sup>9</sup> This process was assisted by intentionally choosing to present *Collaboration's* ecological content in a latent manner. By resisting obvious environmental symbolism, *Collaboration's* portrayal of human ecology was consistent with the formal strategies employed whilst developing sculpture based artworks. This relied on poetic representation to develop an association between materials and concepts. Formally, this manifested as a series of clues or prompts, realised practically as physical connections between trees and pipes, trees and building, and pipe and building, to create metaphoric relationships. My intention was for these connections to surreptitiously create an ecological awareness in the viewer through a self-reflective process that echoed cycles of osmotic absorption.

The use of juxtaposition as a method of creating awareness in Installation Art is discussed by Geczy and Genocchio. Although their discussion centres on the re-contextualisation of ordinary with precious objects as a method to challenge the viewer's interpretation, this concept is also relevant to *Collaboration*:

... the object lends meaning to the space, the space lends meaning to the object. Completing the triangle, the viewer is made to feel conscious of his or her precepts and misprisions.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Geczy, Adam and Genocchio, Benjamin (eds.) 2001, p. 3

<sup>8</sup> Fried, Michael, 'Art and Objecthood', in Harrison, Charles and Wood, Paul (eds.), 1992, pp. 835-846

<sup>9</sup> Kwon, Miwon, 2002, p. 4

<sup>10</sup> Geczy, Adam and Genocchio, Benjamin, in Geczy, Adam and Genocchio, Benjamin (eds.), 2001, p. 2

Considering *Collaboration* this process operates on two levels. Firstly, through the juxtaposition of the two materials comprising the assemblage, and secondly via the relationship between the assemblage and site. The second 'layering' is a direct consequence of neither of these materials (the tree or the pipe) being ordinarily encountered in such an exposed manner indoors. This disjuncture served to challenge viewer's expectations.

In developing poignant associations between natural and synthetic materials, the viewer could reconsider their personal ecological relationship with the wider environment. This was reflected in the conscientious design of *Collaboration* aimed at encouraging viewers to revisit (in their mind) the installation's content. Viewers could either reflect on this experience and reinterpret their own interactions with the natural environment, or discuss the implications for human ecology with others. Focusing on this communicative aspect represented a development in my research; an evolution that in part occurred in response to Kwon's analysis of site-specific art, specifically her division of the 'site' concept into three distinct components: "... phenomenological, social/cultural, and discursive..."<sup>11</sup> This analysis consequently provides a site-specific project with the potential to generate multiple 'sites' either in series or simultaneously.<sup>12</sup>

Assessing the various 'sites' for *Collaboration* via Kwon's concept of site multiplicity; firstly, there is the *physical site* of the exhibition (also referred to as the *phenomenological site*) that allows the viewer to see and interact with the installation – an experience enhanced by using the permanent features within the gallery to integrate the assemblage with the site. This intimate association aided the development of two less tangible 'sites': a *social site*, responding to environmental issues resulting from human ecology and represented as content in the work; and a *discursive site* stemming from conversation and discussion about the installation. Additionally, the discursive site could operate through a

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<sup>11</sup> Kwon, Miwon, 2002, p. 30. I acknowledge that other interpretations analogous to Kwon's discursive site have also been developed by James Meyer - 'functional site', and Grant Kester - 'dialogical site'. All three derivations are concerned with how artworks (especially socially relevant works) initiate discussion.

<sup>12</sup> Kwon refers to Mark Dion's ecological interventions to analyse this system of 'site' development. See Kwon, Miwon, 2001, p. 28.

process of self-awareness; a personal reflexive dialogue that generates an ecological consciousness.<sup>13</sup>

The title *Collaboration* was intended to assist in the development of a discursive site by alluding to the cooperative relationship between the trees (as a natural element) and pipes (as an artificial material) to produce the installation. These associations were aimed at implying that the apparent dichotomy between society and nature is an illusion. In this context I intended to emphasise how co-existence could occur without 'animosity' from conflicting requirements – a situation contrasting with examples where the natural environment is engineered to increase nature's amenity for society. In *The Control of Nature* McPhee details how society attempts to alter the progress of natural processes. Much of the language used to describe this interaction is reminiscent of conflict; "... it's under close surveillance..."<sup>14</sup> we are fighting Mother Nature... It's a battle we have to fight day by day<sup>15</sup> ... direct confrontation<sup>16</sup> ... battle meetings, as they came to be called, were where strategies took form and decisions were made."<sup>17</sup> The irony here is that via being part of nature, society ultimately fights against itself. Additionally, by intentionally working against natural processes the physical and psychological effort required to maintain artificial, mediated landscapes increases over time as progressively complex artificial systems are required to control nature's actions. Specialists reflecting on this type of engagement, and the associated problematic outcomes, have suggested that eventually Mother Nature's 'patience' will result in natural processes gaining the 'upper hand'.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting this situation could also occur with works that are not physically site-specific if their content is socially relevant.

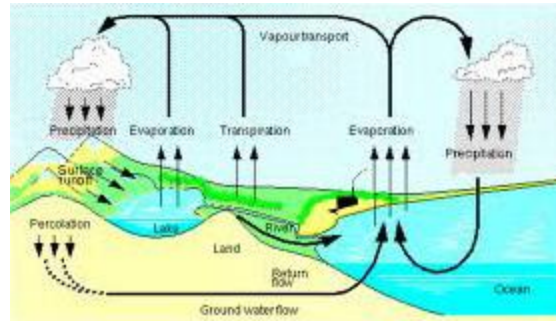
<sup>14</sup> McPhee, John, *The Control of Nature*, New York: The Noonday Press, 1998, p. 9

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 7

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 23

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 110

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 24



**Figure 5: Diagram illustrating the water, or hydrologic cycle.**

Water is cycled through the biosphere, being evaporated by the sun and respired from plants to form water vapour that condenses into clouds. It then returns to the Earth's surface as rain or snow, where it forms rivers or is taken up by vegetation. This is a continuous process, and the water used by society and the natural environment is the *same* resource.



**Figure 6: *Collaboration* (detail), 2007, PVC pipe connection with poplar tree.**

To highlight this circulation I connected PVC pipes to poplar tree trunks in a manner suggesting the potential for water to move through the system, creating an exchange between the pipes and trees.<sup>19</sup> This illusion was enhanced as the system was connected to the PVC pipe extending from the gallery floor, allowing a potential entry point for fluid from an unknown source beyond the gallery. The other aspect of *Collaboration* that attributed to the site-specific relationship was the jointing method used to connect the poplar trunks with the ceiling joists. Rather than simply cross-cutting the trunks to the appropriate length, their ends were shaped, producing a half-bridle joint that enabled them to slot

<sup>19</sup> Rather than using pristine white pipes, I intentionally used recycled pipes that exhibited worn and painted surfaces. This decision was less about making an environmental statement regarding recycling than about incorporating an aesthetic of wear and use. I saw the different colours as often alluding to the various locations where these pipes had been used. Although PVC pipes typically remove, rather than supply water, this reminded me of water's tendency to combine discrete houses, thereby creating a community accessing a common water supply.

over the joists. These customised joints provided a tight-fitting connection, displaying a degree of consideration for incorporating pre-existing elements that would have been absent had I chosen a more rudimentary method, whilst emphasising the building's existence as an extension of the assemblage.<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 7: *Collaboration* (detail), 2007, connection between poplar tree and ceiling joist.**

The pipes conceptually evolved into a metaphor for society, while the trees referenced the natural environment. I used poplar trees as they are a fast growing, water loving species (commonly found growing near dams and rivers) that take root readily if cuttings are immersed in water. They also have a propensity to sucker, producing stands where many hundreds of trees are linked via the same root system. When travelling on the Midlands Highway between Hobart and Launceston there are several locations where a small number of large 'parent' trees have progressively *suckered*, giving rise to thickets of poplars covering significant areas.



**Figure 8: Stand of poplar tree suckers.**

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<sup>20</sup> This connection also referenced the techniques employed when constructing larger, older timber framed buildings. Examples of this can be seen within the Tasmanian School of Art, particularly within the open atrium area. As such the poplar tree joints can also be interpreted as features that reinforce *Collaboration's* relationship to site.



This gradual sprawl of poplars reminded me of the way population centres progressively spread across the landscape. I particularly saw the expansion of these root systems as analogous to the subterranean pipe systems that link houses within suburbs to reticulate potable water, stormwater and sewerage. Comparing the characteristics of these two systems the poplar trees could be read metaphorically as houses, while the pipe networks linking buildings become root systems supplying 'nourishment'. Similarly, being attached to one of these pipe networks via the short length of PVC pipe, *Collaboration* became an offshoot of sorts, a 'sucker', potentially sustained artificially by the building's services.<sup>21</sup>

The formal contrast between the pipes and trunks allowed me to emphasise the artificial regularity of PVC pipes. Whereas *Collaboration's* PVC pipe network 'grows' according to a set of rules governed by the design of individual components, the trees in contrast, show little if any underlying geometric order apart from the attenuation of branches as they grow progressively further from the trunk. Additionally, I saw the pipe's uniform dimensions, linearity and precise PVC fittings as representing the antithesis of the opportunistic organic growth that occurs in response to local environmental conditions.<sup>22</sup> Although the limited options for connecting lengths of pipe via standardised fittings contrasted the apparently random proliferation of branches, these formal differences were united by common function; their ability to transport water. This aspect emphasised that despite society's use of artificial materials and systems it remains intimately connected ecologically, locally and globally, to the natural environment.

By being devoid of leaves the inverted poplar trunks resembled roots.<sup>23</sup> This allusion reminded viewers that unseen root systems can be interpreted as a mirror image of a tree's branch structure. By truncating the branches in a considered manner, an additional illusion was created where they appeared to continue beneath the floor, emphasising that this open space potentially

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<sup>21</sup> As a keen gardener this situation reminded me of hydroponics; an artificial method of growing plants where nutrients are accessed from a water based solution rather than soil. See *Yates Garden Guide* (40<sup>th</sup> edition), Sydney: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998, pp. 54-55.

<sup>22</sup> 'T' junctions and elbows

<sup>23</sup> The poplar trunks were inverted in a pragmatic response aimed at assisting the formation of joints between the trunks and ceiling joists, because the thicker portion of the trunk was toward the top.

contained only a fraction of a larger hidden system. This situation served to remind viewers that visible aspects of actual pipe systems are similarly linked to a hidden subterranean component. In seeing the underside of a first storey floor (the ceiling of the gallery) above *Collaboration* assisted in the reinterpretation of the inverted trees as roots. By 'excavating' the gallery space, an unnatural hybrid had been revealed where the close proximity of natural and artificial systems had combined, however whether the relationship was symbiotic or parasitic remained intentionally ambiguous.

By developing an aesthetic strategy incorporating relevant ecological issues to create the social and discursive sites, *Collaboration* assumed a degree of activism. However unlike a public rally protesting in an overt, direct and objective manner, I focused on using artistic devices such as metaphor, allusion and poetry to question the existing relationship between society and the natural environment. This methodology was consistent with previous sculptural works, where my approach was also non-hierarchical, and ecological issues were not privileged from either a natural or societal perspective. *Collaboration* did however diverge from previous work in its referencing of a specific resource (water) to represent human ecology.<sup>24</sup>

### **3.2 Rhizome (2008)**

*Collaboration* presented an opportunity to develop a considered response to site; a chance to explore possibilities for engaging an audience both physically and conceptually by creating an environment they could enter. It also provided a chance to investigate and contemplate the interaction of different 'sites', and how these embodied a relationship between work, location and viewer. Perhaps as a result of working in a site-specific mode and focusing on how in situ features could be incorporated into creative responses, I became more conscious of *my* role as a resource for creating awareness. Rather than considering resources from a purely material perspective – as in early sculptural responses to human ecology – I began to see how *my* selection of location, and choice of materials, could influence encounters between the

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<sup>24</sup> Previous work had focused on either interaction, or the processing of natural resources generally. Despite primarily employing timber, references to conversion were intended to also encompass other natural resources.

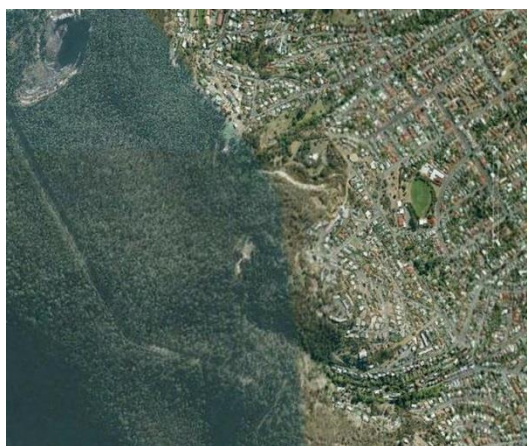
viewer and work, and consequently contribute to the development of a discursive site. This appreciation allowed me to evaluate projects for their ability to develop connections with viewers, and reflect on how employing aesthetic characteristics that resonated with their immediate surroundings (whilst having implications for broader social settings) affected an audience's experience and understanding. By developing these layers of engagement my intention was to expose viewers to alternative perspectives that could in turn assist with the reinterpretation of other aspects of their interaction with the natural environment.

Creating this awareness required me to research suitable locations for highlighting the interrelationship between society and nature. To this end I found myself drawn to the suburban fringe, walking along urban water courses, behind backyard fences, or along the estuarine shores of the Derwent River. Here I witnessed a multitude of diverse exchanges between society and nature: discarded rubbish caught in a tree; exotic plant species overcoming indigenous vegetation; or the presence of artificial pipes discharging into natural watercourses. Contrasting similar situations concerning the spread of new development into a relatively natural landscape, these instances possessed an atmosphere of acceptance; as if nature and the artificial intrusions had reached an understanding or a negotiated truce. Additionally the weathered, overgrown or damaged appearance of the surrounding infrastructure gave the artificial features an understated presence, highlighting the impact of the ongoing exchange between society and nature. For me this obscuration encouraged a closer examination to determine how society and nature share specific spaces, and how the consequences of this exchange could be incorporated into an artistic response.

It was around this time that a serendipitous and informative event occurred. While explaining my work to a friend, employed as an urban planning consultant, he informed me the areas I was focusing on were referred to as the peri-urban. *Change and Continuity in Peri-urban Australia, State of the Peri-Urban Regions*, a recent major publication by researchers investigating the

dynamics within this zone,<sup>25</sup> acknowledged it is difficult to define the peri-urban zone in a precise manner. Instead the report generally refers to it as the transitional area between contiguous development and “... the truly rural hinterland.”<sup>26</sup> Of relevance for my identification of areas where the interaction between nature and society were heightened, the authors recognised that the peri-urban “... [is] among the most contested areas on earth as these locations inevitably lead to conflicts between land uses. It is important to understand these regions and to minimise or mitigate negative social, economic or environmental impacts that may result.”<sup>27</sup> With this new perspective and appreciation for the characteristics of the peri-urban I decided to more closely examine Hobart's peri-urban zones.

Unlike many large population centres, the majority of Hobart's development exists within a narrow strip bounded by the Derwent River on one side, and hills and mountains on the other. This creates a situation where the peri-urban zone delineating suburban development from surrounding indigenous bush is unusually narrow.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, my observations indicated this transitional zone typically occurs within a narrow band over just ten or twenty metres.



**Figure 9: A typical image of Hobart's peri-urban zone detailing the abrupt transitional zone between suburbia and native vegetation.**

Consequently the manifestation of this change in ecosystem is squeezed, pressure cooker-like, into a thin band amplifying any interactions between

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<sup>25</sup> Buxton, Michael, Tieman, George, et al., *Change and Continuity in Peri-urban Australia, State of the Peri-urban Regions: A Review of the Literature*, Melbourne: RMIT University, 2006

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 17

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> This transition is further emphasised as the topography prevents any 'broad-acre' development that could act as a buffer between contiguous development and native vegetation.

society and nature. Other significant features are the regular interjection of watercourses through contiguous development; a result of the consistently steep terrain that lies behind Hobart's suburbs. Though these verdant punctuations function as breathing spaces – such as areas of recreation etc. – they also operate as a series of metaphorical nerves along which communication and exchange between development and nature occur.

The Hobart Rivulet played a significant role in Hobart's history as its year-round supply of freshwater was critical for the survival of Europeans who settled the site in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>29</sup> Although it remains a waterway, the vegetation has been reduced to a thin strip with contrasting contiguous development occupying the majority of the surrounding land; a situation made particularly evident as The Rivulet travels through South Hobart. The abruptness associated with this circumstance results in The Rivulet acting simultaneously as a peri-urban zone and ecotone,<sup>30</sup> creating an area where interactions between society and nature are particularly dynamic and complex.

*The Mountain Festival Sculpture Trail*, located along The Hobart Rivulet site, uses sculpture, installation and intervention as a means of reinterpreting the relationship between Hobart's inhabitants and the surrounding environment.<sup>31</sup> I saw the *2008 Sculpture Trail* as an opportunity to develop a site-specific response highlighting human ecology in an outdoor setting.<sup>32</sup> I was specifically interested in how the publicity generated by the event, combined with the public's high use of the adjacent walking trail could, via my development of a site-specific installation, create a discursive site to promote ecological awareness.

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<sup>29</sup> John Williamson, "Hobart Rivulet", Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, [http://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion\\_to\\_tasmanian\\_history/H/Hobart Rivulet.htm](http://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/H/Hobart%20Rivulet.htm) (accessed January 2008)

<sup>30</sup> An ecotone is the transitional zone between different ecosystems. In this case it is between the suburban ecosystem and the rivulet ecosystem. These zones are typically inhabited by species from both ecologies and therefore frequently represent locations with a rich biodiversity. See Swanage, Maureen (ed.), 1994, p. 91.

<sup>31</sup> The Trail forms part of *The Mountain Festival*, a biennial festival celebrating the cultural contribution of Mt. Wellington to the City of Hobart, and more generally the connections between Hobart's inhabitants and the surrounding natural environment.

<sup>32</sup> *The Mountain Festival Sculpture Trail* is located along a portion of the Hobart Rivulet, a short walk from Hobart's city centre.

Lippard suggests that “[a]rtists can be very good at exposing the layers of emotional and aesthetic resonance in our relationship to place... [by offering] tantalizing glimpses of new ways to enter everyday life.”<sup>33</sup> To facilitate the generation of an alternative perspective representing the interaction between society and The Rivulet, my project consisted of two distinct but intrinsically related phases. The first consisted of a detailed survey along the portion of the Hobart Rivulet surrounded by development. This process involved walking beside and within The Rivulet to investigate exchanges with the adjacent man-made infrastructure. These observations created an understanding of the context surrounding these exchanges, while simultaneously developing my appreciation more generally for the location. This process of familiarisation served as inspiration for a more conceptually relevant and sincere response.



**Figure 10: PVC stormwater pipe outfall adjacent to the Hobart Rivulet.**

While traversing The Rivulet the presence of stormwater pipes attracted my attention. Although these features represented a minor visual imposition, being frequently obscured by vegetation, they nonetheless represented a connection between The Rivulet and surroundings. I saw the function of these pipes as a symbol for the control of nature through regulating water run-off from impervious surfaces.<sup>34</sup> Rain falling onto these surfaces was collected by drains at strategic points, and then efficiently piped to The Rivulet, amalgamating the natural catchment formed by Mt. Wellington's topography with artificial urban catchments in the process. For me, the operation of these analogous artificial

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<sup>33</sup> Lippard, Lucy, 1997, p. 286

<sup>34</sup> Typically these consisted of roads, car parks and building roofs.

and natural systems came to represent society's desire to 'improve' on nature by using engineered solutions.<sup>35</sup>

Landscape architect Barbara Schaffer has worked on projects rehabilitating urban watercourses in Sydney, and comments that water "... more than any other element has the potential to forge an emotional link between humanity and nature within the city."<sup>36</sup> Applied specifically to waterways, Schaffer's statement serves as a reminder that this water is frequently transported from areas where nature dominates (via rivulets and rivers) into population centres, creating a tangible, if largely unrecognised link. This situation is exemplified by the Hobart Rivulet's channelling of water from the sparsely developed slopes of Mt. Wellington through suburbia to the Derwent River via the centre of Hobart. Mirroring this physical link, the stormwater pipe outfalls along the Hobart Rivulet represent manifest connections between The Rivulet and surrounding suburban development by allowing the exchange of water following rain. Despite their small scale these artificial outfalls serve to allude more generally to the ubiquitous subterranean pipe networks under the city.<sup>37</sup> By incorporating some of these pipe outfalls into a creative response; my intention was to highlight society and nature's co-existence in a mutually inclusive relationship via employing water's pervasive presence to mediate between the built and natural environments.

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<sup>35</sup> However such measures are not without issues as one local study has illustrated. *Hobart Regional Councils: A Focus on the New Town Rivulet Catchment*, Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment (DPIWE), Tasmania. Derwent Estuary Program, "Stormwater Management Plan - A Model for Hobart Regional Councils, A Focus on the New Town Rivulet Catchment", Derwent Estuary Program, [http://www.derwentestuary.org.au/assets/Stormwater\\_mgt\\_plan\\_for\\_councils\\_-\\_Chap1-3.pdf](http://www.derwentestuary.org.au/assets/Stormwater_mgt_plan_for_councils_-_Chap1-3.pdf) (accessed July 2012)

Of conceptual relevance to the development of *Rhizome* (the work to be introduced on the following page) is the study's reference to the high velocity of storm water run-off from impermeable surfaces as contributing to soil erosion, spread of pollution, and increased flood potential through reduced lag times.

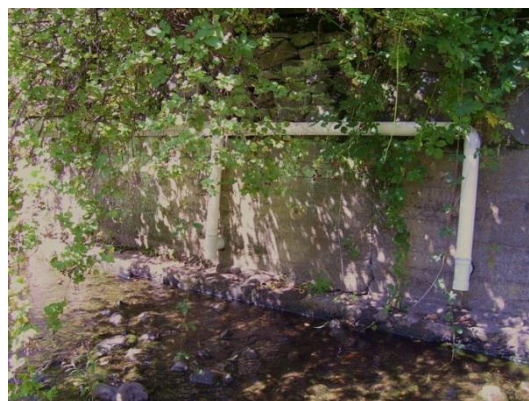
<sup>36</sup> Schaffer, Barbara, 'Restoring the Waters', in Mossop, Elizabeth and Walton, Paul (eds.), *City Spaces: Art and Design*, Sydney: Fine Art Publishing Pty Ltd., 2001, p. 88

<sup>37</sup> The Hobart City Council is responsible for over 1000 kilometres of pipe with a replacement value of \$470 million. See Hobart City Council, "Water Infrastructure", Hobart City Council, <http://www.hobartcity.com.au/Home> (accessed March 2011).



**Figure 11: *Rhizome* (detail), 2008.**

A rhizome is a root-like subterranean stem, growing horizontally to produce roots below, and shoots at regular intervals from the upper surface.<sup>38</sup> The title *Rhizome* refers to the metaphorical association between the spread of suburbia (as represented by the PVC pipe network) and the growth habit of some plants. In particular, I saw rhizomatous plant growth as representing the pipe networks linking buildings and other infrastructure as development spreads progressively outwards into the natural environment. This analogy is emphasised as the installation of underground networks prior to construction gives the impression that buildings and roads somehow 'sprouted' from these pipes. Similarly I wanted to draw on this spontaneous aspect of modern development, creating an installation with an element of surprise that had the potential to 'knock' viewers from their complacent attitude towards familiar features.



**Figure 12: *Rhizome*, 2008 (detail), connections between installation and pre-existing pipe outfalls.**

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<sup>38</sup> *Yates Garden Guide* (40<sup>th</sup> Edition), 1998, p. 203



The proposed site, in combination with *Rhizome's* form, required me to consult with hydraulic engineers from the Hobart City Council regarding potential issues. Somewhat ironically their concerns focused on the potential for flood waters to sweep *Rhizome* away, causing blockages further downstream.<sup>39</sup> I had planned to attach *Rhizome* to stormwater outlets located in a concrete retaining wall beside The Rivulet and have the PVC pipes cross just above the water and disappear into the adjacent bank. However to placate the engineers' concerns, the pipes were repositioned to cross The Rivulet at a height that placed them above the potential level of flood waters. This resulted in a length of vertical pipe being inserted to connect the stormwater outlets with the horizontal pipes crossing The Rivulet. Initially I was concerned this compromise would disrupt my attempt to emphasise interactions between the natural and synthetic rivulets, however this increased distance came to symbolise (and embody) the general separation frequently required between built and natural features in an effort to prevent damage to infrastructure.<sup>40</sup>

As an artificial object that mimicked actual infrastructure, *Rhizome* encouraged the viewer to reinterpret localised relationships between society and nature.<sup>41</sup> This was reinforced in practice by employing pre-existing infrastructure to 'ground' the work resulting in an implicit interaction with the location; despite *Rhizome* playing no functional role in altering its setting ecologically. *Rhizome's* lack of active participation was the main feature that distinguished it from works referred to as *ecoventions*.<sup>42</sup> The crux of an *ecovention* is its capacity to actively engage a site to influence the local ecology, frequently taking form as a

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<sup>39</sup> Quite frankly this outcome would have suited me fine; however the engineers' insistence prompted changes.

<sup>40</sup> For example space between trees and buildings to prevent roots cracking foundations; trees and power lines; or barriers to avert flooding.

<sup>41</sup> To achieve this I relied on the familiarity of the site and associated expectations. While installing *Rhizome* I became aware that many people use this pedestrian path to commute to and from the city.

Olafur Eliasson's interventions comprising *Green River* also seek to reconnect inhabitants of cities with rivers as natural features by disrupting expectations. By selecting populated areas to colour rivers using a non-toxic green dye, Eliasson created the potential for an altered perception of natural features whose familiarity can result in their presence and contribution to people's lives becoming overlooked. This project has been conducted in Los Angeles, Bregenz in Germany and Moss in Norway. See interview between Daniel Birnbaum and Olafur Eliasson in *Olafur Eliasson*, New York: Phaidon Press Ltd., 2002, p. 17.

<sup>42</sup> The term *ecovention* is a portmanteau produced from combining the words ecology and intervention. See Spaid, Sue, 2002, p. 1.

community-assisted reclamation or regeneration project.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, *Rhizome's* engagement occurred on a purely conceptual level, the work relying on suggestion to convey connections with ecological issues.

The historical significance of many urban water courses, their public visibility, close proximity to intensive development, and frequent ecological deterioration combine to create an ideal location for *ecoventions*. One example is the *Restoring the Waters Project* (1995 - present) that converted a concrete lined water channel into an ecologically diverse habitat by understanding and implementing the characteristics of natural water courses. Despite the restorative drive behind this community project the aim was not to "... return the stream to its original pristine condition but... support a more sustainable environment in harmony with today's human landscape."<sup>44</sup> This decision in *Restoring the Waters* to accept that human development alters the natural is in keeping with my desire to highlight through *Rhizome* that society *is* part of nature, that we are incontrovertibly linked to the natural environment.



**Figure 13: Michaelie Crawford and Jennifer Turpin, *The Memory Line*, 1996.**

*Rhizome's* visual methodology<sup>45</sup> for reinterpreting an aspect of a suburban watercourse positioned it more closely to a work initiated by Michaelie Crawford and Jennifer Turpin as part of *Restoring the Waters*. Crawford and

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 3

<sup>44</sup> Fairfield City Council, "Clear Paddock Creek – Restoring the Waters Project", Fairfield City Council, [http://www.fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au/upload/xxkcn99969/Clear\\_Paddock\\_Creek\\_Restoring\\_the\\_Waters.pdf](http://www.fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au/upload/xxkcn99969/Clear_Paddock_Creek_Restoring_the_Waters.pdf) (accessed May 2012)

<sup>45</sup> As opposed to a practical engagement.

Turpin co-ordinated community groups in sowing a line of rye grass to denote the pre-development path of Clear Paddock Creek, in Fairfield, Sydney.<sup>46</sup>

Additionally, the intention of their work, *The Memory Line* (1996), "... to creatively elaborate on the relationship, rather than the schism, between the cultures of nature and suburbia..."<sup>47</sup> paralleled my intention for *Rhizome* that aimed to highlight the confluence of natural and artificial catchments. Whilst Crawford and Turpin's aesthetic for representing this interrelationship varied dramatically from *Rhizome's*, both works employed the concept of growth as a central consideration. With *The Memory Line* growth became symbolic of a desire to augment social awareness through the increased visibility of the rye grass as an indicator of natural features erased by development,<sup>48</sup> while *Rhizome* relied on a conceptual link between the spread of actual rhizomatous plants and the installation's form that alluded to development's expansion.



**Figure 14: *Rhizome*, 2008.**

Breaking *Rhizome* into two discrete though related forms assisted in referencing the growth habit of plant rhizomes. The first component consisted of the horizontal pipes traversing The Rivulet, while the second manifested as an agglomeration of smaller diameter PVC pipes that emerged higher up The Rivulet's embankment. Although these aspects were not physically linked, the form of the work intimated there was an unseen connection between the two. My intention was for the pipes higher on the bank to be seen as an offshoot from

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<sup>46</sup> The rye grass 'line' extended for a distance of 2.7 kilometres.

<sup>47</sup> Crawford, Michaelie and Turpin, Jennifer, 'The Memory Line: Art in Suburban Ecologies', in Mossop, Elizabeth and Walton, Paul (eds.), 2001, p. 94

<sup>48</sup> The rye grass's progressively greater visual presence could also be seen as a metaphor for the gradual increase in inhabitant's appreciation for natural features that have been altered or deleted as a result of development.

the 'primary pipes' spanning The Rivulet; an illusion emphasised by the careful alignment of the locations where the large PVC pipes disappeared in relation to the exit points of two corresponding pipes higher on the bank.<sup>49</sup>

The longer lengths of pipe crossing The Rivulet were juxtaposed with shorter pipes 'growing' on the bank. I wanted these pipes higher on the bank to appear like vertical 'shoots' emerging from an implied underground portion of a network connected to the pipes traversing The Rivulet. I intended these 'shoots' to appear as though they had 'grown' upwards and subsequently succumbed to gravity, taking root where they touched the ground, only to sprout upwards again.<sup>50</sup> This process was intended as a metaphor for development's tendency to gradually spread outwards from a particular point. This secondary network of smaller diameter pipes also had vertical lengths topped by sections of willow branch, echoing previous works where tree elements were paired with pipes in an allusion to their functional similarity. However in the case of *Rhizome*, the synthesis of willow was also intended to highlight how willows *and* stormwater pipes have been introduced to The Rivulet. Additionally, the fact that this particular species of willow (crack willow) has been declared an environmental weed<sup>51</sup> served as a means to question the appropriateness of indiscriminate development.

The artificiality of PVC is exemplified by its stark white appearance that resists discolouration from weathering. For this reason the short lengths of PVC pipe channelling stormwater from impervious surfaces were often visually pronounced despite their diminutive size. Similarly, this white colouration enabled *Rhizome* to stand out from its surroundings, reinforcing its visible connection with the stormwater pipes and permitting a fuller appreciation of the work's conceptual dimension; a visibility enhanced by the work's location. Following my initial survey I selected the nominated site as it allowed an unimpeded view of the installation from an elevated position on a pedestrian

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<sup>49</sup> I reinforced the reference to potential expansion by repeating this process as the ends of the two subsequent pipes likewise vanished into the ground.

<sup>50</sup> This form alludes to the method of propagation referred to as layering, where a stem is bent horizontally to lay along the ground. Roots then emerge from leaf nodes where they touch the ground. See Stewart, Angus, *Let's Propagate*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2012, pp. 93 - 97.

<sup>51</sup> Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment, "Weeds Index", Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment, <http://www.dpiw.tas.gov.au/inter.nsf/WebPages/SSKA-73U3QA?open> (accessed August 2008)

footpath. This location also generated an element of surprise as trees positioned close to the track both upstream and downstream meant *Rhizome* came into view abruptly. I hoped this sudden appearance of the work would catch viewers off guard, and contribute to destabilising their familiarity to create a shift in their perception of interactions between development and The Rivulet.

The white PVC pipes also reminded me of bones; or the remains of a hidden infrastructure exposed by flood water erosion. In this light, *Rhizome* could be interpreted as referencing industrial ruins still visible along The Rivulet. Traces of this past can be seen in the form of dilapidated concrete walls, rusted pipes extending from the ground, discarded red bricks and localised alterations to topography.



**Figure 15: Industrial remains beside the Hobart Rivulet.**

Although not actually engaging directly with artefacts from this industrial past, my acknowledgement of their presence was in keeping with the creation of a relevant ecological aesthetic.<sup>52</sup> A consideration of ecological aesthetics when developing works such as *Rhizome* can assist in creating artistic responses that emphasise interrelationships. Where human activity is concerned, ecological aesthetics seek to highlight that nature and society are inclusive by pointing out connections.<sup>53</sup> In *Rhizome*'s case this manifested as recognition that the Hobart Rivulet has a long history of representing an amalgamation between a natural and artificial catchment.

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<sup>52</sup> The transition of what was previously an industrial area into a park – used for recreation and social activities – exemplifies the concept of a *drosscape*. In such instances a location's function can become transformed as population centres expand outwards, creating opportunities to redevelop prominent but decommissioned industrial sites. See Berger, Alan, 2006, p. 12.

<sup>53</sup> Strelow, Heike, 'A dialogue with ongoing processes', in Strelow, Heike (ed.), 2004, p. 11

Whilst developing *Rhizome* I became aware that similar interactions are particularly pronounced in areas separating different ecologies, particularly at the interface between development and nature. With this insight I was interested in taking advantage of other opportunities to further develop my appreciation for how ecological aesthetics could be used to mediate between the built and natural environments.

### 3.3 *Stick-out* (2008)

*Friendly Beaches Lodge* on the East Coast of Tasmania represents a deliberate attempt by developers to minimise the impact of buildings on the natural environment.<sup>54</sup> Practically, this manifested through an extensive use of oiled timber that weathered over time to blend with the natural hues of surrounding native vegetation.



**Figure 16: Timber stained and weathered lodge blends with its surroundings.**

This was also an opportunity to respond to a situation that sat in contrast to the Hobart Rivulet context. Instead of a strip of nature surrounded by development – as represented by The Rivulet – Friendly Beaches consisted of several buildings each surrounded by an extensive area of natural vegetation.

Echoing the process employed for *The Mountain Festival Sculpture Trail*, a survey of the site was conducted prior to the development of any creative response. To assist with this process, information sessions provided by guides

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<sup>54</sup> Welcome notes in *Ephemeral art at the Invisible Lodge* exhibition catalogue 2008 by co-curator David Handley.



familiar with the local flora and fauna provided an appreciation for the area's natural significance.<sup>55</sup> I was particularly attracted to the dichotomy between the development and their immediate natural surroundings with a view to *testing* the environmental 'invisibility' of the lodges. Although my intention was to critique the development,<sup>56</sup> this was also a rare chance to work in an area officially recognised for its ecological value, and due to its limited impact, an opportunity to explore physical and conceptual boundaries concerning the effects of development.

Focusing my attention on the area surrounding the lodges I looked for exchanges between the buildings and their local environment. During these observations I noticed that casuarina saplings had been removed by cross cutting their trunks to create a clearing; a barrier between the lodges and surrounding vegetation.<sup>57</sup> My impression was this process spoke of the desire to be within nature, but simultaneously insulated from it by manipulating the progression of natural processes. Significantly, in circumstances such as the Hobart Rivulet where development was more pronounced, such subtle exchanges could easily be lost in the milieu of interactions. Additionally, I saw a similarity between the peri-urban zone surrounding Hobart and the area immediately around the lodges. This realisation, combined with an interpretation of *Rhizome's* form as a 'bridge' (physically connecting the natural and artificial by extending the stormwater network), prompted me to consider a similar response for linking the lodges and removed saplings.



**Figure 17: A comparison of the zone separating the lodge (left) with Hobart's peri-urban zone (right).**

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<sup>55</sup> The Lodges are surrounded by the Freycinet National Park with the property itself being subject to a conservation covenant. Information detailed in unpublished literature provided to participating artists.

<sup>56</sup> Considering my invitation this stance could be interpreted as a potentially provocative response.

<sup>57</sup> Via verbal communication from staff I was informed that this was a precautionary measure initiated by a bush fire in January 2006 that came to within approximately 100 metres of the lodges.

*Stick-out*, as the title suggests, was intended to highlight that even ecologically sensitive development affects the natural environment. Additionally, echoing my other projects, this work sought to point out connections between society and nature, to create an awareness of humanity's interrelationship with the natural environment. My response focused on rebuilding the removed casuarina saplings and physically connecting them to the lodges to highlight an exchange between the buildings and their surrounds. By incorporating qualities from both the lodge and casuarina saplings my intention was to reinterpret the removed vegetation as synthetic hybrids. These architectonic structures would then form a metaphorical bridge; a gesture of aesthetic reconciliation.



**Figure 18: Formal comparison between *Stick-out* (construction 1), 2008, and *Stand*, 2007.**

*Stick-out* borrowed formally from the earlier sculpture *Stand* by similarly using space frame structures constructed from dressed sticks as tree replacements. However unlike *Stand*, *Stick-out* was site-specific, prompting the selection of an appropriate timber species to maintain a level of authenticity and create a stronger connection between the construction and locality. To this end dead casuarina tree trunks were salvaged from the Queen's Domain in Hobart and converted to uniformly dimensioned sticks of three different cross sectional sizes (20, 15 and 10 mm square).<sup>58</sup> This time consuming operation gave me an opportunity to gain an appreciation for the qualities of casuarina timber – the hardness, smell, texture and colour, together with the intriguing complexity of the characteristic grain pattern.

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<sup>58</sup> The conservation covenant prohibited the use of salvaged timber from the Friendly Beaches site.



The process of assembling these sticks to 'rebuild' saplings reminded me of society's efforts to recreate areas of natural habitat; to restore ecologies that have been eliminated or damaged as a result of commercial or industrial processes. As my aesthetic strategy diverged significantly from the removed tree's natural form, no viewer would mistake *Stick-out* for a real tree. At best my 'trees' would appear as poor facsimiles, simulacra of sorts. As such the linear quality of these constructions, set amongst the curved forms of surrounding saplings, operated like beacons to alert viewers to exchanges between the built and natural environment. Additionally, using formal differences to highlight interactions contrasts with many actual re-mediation projects that are intended to accurately replicate a location's pre-development ecology, and eradicate evidence of society's intervention in the process.<sup>59</sup> In belonging to neither the natural or built environment these assemblages were able to transcend their surroundings, allowing them to physically and conceptually mediate the natural and artificial.

*Stick-out's* restorative action was on a small, anti-heroic scale, with each of the two constructions relating specifically to the removal of one particular sapling. By dealing with this aspect on a human scale I was able to create an intimate, uncomplicated scenario that prompted viewers to consider the possibility of other small scale in situ exchanges.<sup>60</sup>

The construction of an environmentally sensitive building within 'nature', isolated from other development, might seem at odds with the environmental effects industrial sites have on their locations. However the key consideration is that each has a similar impact on the natural environment through artificially adjusting their surroundings through a process of intervention, manipulation and exchange. At the time of his premature death, Robert Smithson was at the forefront of developing proposals for abandoned mining sites, locations that had been affected by industry.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, together with Robert Morris, Smithson pioneered developing artistic responses to locations degraded through human

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<sup>59</sup> Elliot, Robert, 'Faking Nature', in Pojman, Louis P. (ed.), 2001, pp. 229 - 230

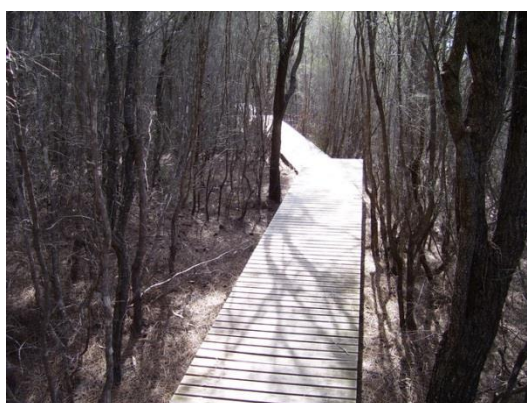
<sup>60</sup> Throughout the duration of my research it had been my intention to focus on the subtle, drawing attention to situations that might otherwise remain hidden and unnoticed.

<sup>61</sup> Spaid, Sue, 2002, p. 54

intervention.<sup>62</sup> The formal contrast between *Stick-out* and other saplings was consistent with Smithson's view that the artist should not aim to ameliorate the negative effects of development.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, Smithson's concept of restoration "... meant re-evaluating a site's ugliness or appreciating its problematic condition for what it is."<sup>64</sup> Such sentiments are shared by the cultural historian Malcolm Miles when he refers to an ecological aesthetic as:

... an art which inquires deeply into present conditions, which does not regress or conjure illusions of arcadia but works in the cracks as the seed of a new consciousness which no longer needs to mythicise...<sup>65</sup>

In light of Miles' statement I realised that *Stick-out's* constructions were also positioned appropriately, in what could be termed the 'crack' separating the constructed lodge from nature.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, via representing the relationship in an unsentimental manner, I was emphasising that the artificial modification of the natural environment is an inevitable consequence of the human/nature relationship.



**Figure 19: 'Duckboard' walkway surrounded by natural vegetation.**

Unsurprisingly, the two main factors that influenced development of *Stick-Out's* constructions were the surrounding vegetation and the lodge's architecture. However, another aspect that affected the project was the period of time spent working on location. Over the project's four days I gradually developed an

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<sup>62</sup> Dettmar, Jörg, "Ecological and aesthetic aspects of succession on derelict industrial sites", in Strelow, Heike (ed.) 2004, p. 156

<sup>63</sup> Spaid, Sue, 2002, p. 12

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Malcolm Miles as quoted in Collins, Timothy, 'Towards an aesthetic of Diversity', in Strelow, Heike (ed.), 2004, p. 170

<sup>66</sup> *Rhizome's* location *within* the Hobart Rivulet could also be considered as being in a 'crack'.

awareness from (and for) engaging the site by actually being there and absorbing the various characteristics. I gained a greater appreciation for the lodge's relationship to the surrounding bush and how constructed features (the lodges themselves and duckboard walkways connecting the lodges) could be used as inspiration to inform the shape of *Stick-out's* assemblages.

More generally, the light, sounds, smells and textures of the site combined to create an exotic atmosphere where the potential for intuitive responses abounded. This process contrasted with the methodology applied to produce the initial proposal where, following a brief introductory site visit and with the aid of limited notes and images, I detailed my response working in a relatively detached manner. Lippard discusses these diverse approaches when she considers how generic space becomes transformed into place. Contrasting with the anonymity of space, Lippard considers places as locations seen from the inside that have been explored and experienced physically over a period of time,<sup>67</sup> echoing the encounter I was having with the Friendly Beaches site.

In tandem with these 'place-making' experiences, I was also working in a zetetic mode.<sup>68</sup> This methodology was consistent with previous projects (*Collaboration* and *Rhizome*) that had also used aspects from each site to 'anchor' assemblages, allowing them to formally and conceptually expand based on my greater appreciation for the material and location I was working in. This process of 'discovery' while undertaking site-specific projects is curiously consistent with John Armstrong's philosophy of art appreciation.<sup>69</sup> Armstrong proposes that via a process initiated by affection, the viewer is prompted to learn – to gain information.<sup>70</sup> Significantly though, "... information does not foster affection..."<sup>71</sup> alluding to the adage that ignorance can indeed be bliss. I avoided this situation by working in an intuitive mode, where conceptual development was achieved primarily by incorporating ideas derived from sensation rather than considered

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<sup>67</sup> Lippard, Lucy, 1997, pp. 7-8. Additionally the familiarity gained whilst machining the casuarina sticks regarding the timber's properties, could also be considered a form of 'place-making'.

<sup>68</sup> Zetetic - the process of proceeding by inquiry *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*.

<sup>69</sup> Armstrong, John, *Move Closer - An Intimate Philosophy of Art*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000

<sup>70</sup> I use the term 'viewer' as a reference to myself, and affection as the state of reflecting on particular qualities, sensations and poetic experiences to formulate ideas and responses.

<sup>71</sup> Armstrong, John, 2000, p. 14

reasoning. However Armstrong also suggests that if *the combination* of affection and information is of a high 'quality', reverie can result, and the generation of associations not necessarily about, but extending from pre-existing stimuli, can occur.

The aforementioned paraphrasing of Armstrong's analysis can be reinterpreted from the perspective of my association with locations during site-specific projects. Initially an affection manifested; an attraction to particular locations where interactions between natural and artificial elements occur. Examining these situations over time and experiencing these locations physically, I extracted information, both formally and informally, that led to knowledge. These two aspects (affection and information) allowed the development of abstract connections between observations and ideas to extend formal and conceptual considerations.

Despite spending a significant amount of time collecting and preparing material prior to my arrival at Friendly Beaches, my proposal consisted of nothing more specific than a desire to use sapling trunks to initiate a series of structures that would connect with the lodges. The first construction *Stick-out* (construction 1) had four 'legs' with one sitting atop the designated casuarina stump to form a physical connection. Although this arrangement gave the impression of a miniature tower metaphorically inviting a review of the surroundings from a new perspective (particularly the relationship between the lodge and nature) the reality was more pragmatic. A tower-like form was selected as it contrasted significantly with the surrounding saplings and provided a stable, strong base, whilst allowing scope for new elements to be added in a multitude of configurations. Additionally, the orthogonal grid-like format was suggestive of an artificial standard against which nature could be compared or measured while mirroring actual building techniques. Details such as vertical elements having their ends cut at an angle,<sup>72</sup> in combination with the precision of screwed joints, enhanced associations between the structure and its potential function as an anachronistic technical apparatus.

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<sup>72</sup> A reference to a method frequently employed to prevent decay by minimising the ingress of water into timber end-grain.

Expanding progressively, *Stick-out* (construction 1) responded opportunistically to existing elements, creating physical links with the intention of developing conceptual associations through which to reinterpret the relationship between the natural and artificial. Examples were a nearby sapling that was 'captured' and framed by the sticks, perhaps implying this casuarina's proximity to the lodge might necessitate its future removal.



**Figure 20: *Stick-out* (construction 1, detail), 2008.**

This connection also alluded to potential exchanges that could have occurred between the removed sapling and this adjacent 'brethren' – specifically their interaction when the wind blew, or through the sharing of resources such as soil, light and nutrients. On the opposing side, the structure engaged the lodge wall by wedging a stick between two studs emphasising that timber exists on this site as both tree and building material. The space between the lodge and stump was connected via a 'cross-over' that maintained accessibility to an informal path alongside the building. By including the viewer in the work as they passed under the stick, my intention was to refer to the situation, where nature being altered if not destroyed by the constructed context, was a direct function of their desire to visit and stay at this location.

The second structure, *Stick-out* (construction 2), relied on similar material and fixing methods, however it also incorporated information I had accumulated while working on location. In developing this structure I found it was possible to reference aspects of the lodge's architecture – specifically the geometry of the pitched roof – and employ this feature when arranging elements to create a form that more closely mimicked branches within a tree's crown. By referencing

aesthetics from both the lodge and sapling to create a hybrid form, the second structure was able to visually mediate between the natural and artificial in a manner that was inaccessible to *Stick-out* (construction 1).



**Figure 21 and Figure 22: *Stick-out* (construction 2 detail), 2008.**

These formal developments resulted directly from my increased familiarity with site characteristics, exemplifying how engagement with a space can develop over time into a lived sense of place. This 'evolution' also allowed me to appreciate how familiarity can result in an awareness that facilitates the representation of a more sincere and revealing ecological aesthetic.

Applying a formal device first explored in *Stand*, my intention was to bring the tree analogy to completion by combining casuarina needles (phyllodes) as 'foliage' with the two structures. However while working on *Stick-out* (construction 1 and 2) I began to consider how the lodge's construction had also displaced the endemic flora, and how, unlike the negotiated process occurring around the periphery of the lodge, this disruption represented an initial incursion into an area without previous development. One consequence of this incursion manifested in the redistribution of casuarina needles that stopped predominantly at the building's outline. This observation motivated me to engage the lodge itself by symbolically replacing the 'mat' of needles as a requiem to the removed vegetation, while creating a metaphorical 'welcome mat' to symbolically reunite nature with the lodge.



### 3.4 *Welcome* (2008)



Figure 23: *Welcome*, 2008.

Although *Welcome* embodied a continuing desire to connect the lodge with its surroundings, a significant difference was embedded in the treatment of the material itself. Whereas *Stick-out*'s constructions used processed imported timber, *Welcome* incorporated material from site, *au naturale*. This decision was consistent with the exhibition's guideline to "... create a work of art that sits in and uses the natural environment."<sup>73</sup> An additional development was the contrasting approach to planning, represented on the one hand by the initially considered response to construct the general form of *Stick-out* (construction 1), and on the other by the spontaneous and intuitive creation of *Welcome*.<sup>74</sup> By using the needles as an unmodified natural material, an uninterrupted visual link was created between the needles surrounding the lodge, and those placed between boards on the deck. This had the concomitant effect of pulling the surroundings in, assisting to collapse the perceived dualism separating nature and society by highlighting that the lodge, despite its artificiality, did not exist as an isolated entity. I came to realise that despite the two *Stick-out* construction's ability to conceptually address the interrelationship between nature and the lodge, their synthetic appearance somewhat compromised their 'operation' as the work existed primarily as an artificial object, rather than the setting that framed it. This reflexive quality was emphasised through *Stick-out* (construction 1) literally functioning as a 'bridge' and the irony created by its pretension to be a tree. In contrast, *Welcome* did not pretend to be anything other than an

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<sup>73</sup> See *Ephemeral Art at the Invisible Lodge* exhibition catalogue, welcome from David Handley.

<sup>74</sup> Although aspects of previous works could also be considered intuitive and spontaneous *Welcome* embodied this mode of working from its inception.

arrangement of casuarina needles, relying solely on context provided by the lodge to highlight ecological relationships.<sup>75</sup>

I interpreted the deck as existing between the lodge proper and its surrounds as no wall or roof protected or isolated it from the effects of nature. This realisation also allowed *Welcome* to exist in nature while being physically disconnected, literally elevated, from the wider environment. Despite essentially using the needles 'as found', the regularity of their lines could none-the-less be interpreted as a domestication of the natural, an ordering of the seemingly random to produce a hybrid aesthetic that was simultaneously defined by the form of the needles and the lodge's architecture. Additionally, this repetitious linear arrangement of needles alluded to the cultivation of formal gardens surrounding suburban homes, the regimental precision associated with crops planted in ploughed fields, or trees growing within a plantation.



**Figure 24: Comparison of the structured linear form of a tree plantation (left) with detail of *Welcome*, 2008 (right).**

The gaps had been placed between adjacent decking boards to allow material – water, leaves and dirt – to fall through, with a view to protecting the timber from decay. Subverting this function referenced similar situations such as the blocking of roof gutters by leaves that causes water from building roofs to overflow uncontrollably.<sup>76</sup> An additional subversive act came in the form of *Welcome's* negation of the advantage gained by removing the casuarina saplings

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<sup>75</sup> I had initially intended on combining the casuarina needles with *Stick-out's* structures however by choosing to use the deck as the literal ground for the work, the building became a metaphorical trunk or limb, allowing the lodge to be reinterpreted as an artificial tree, a replacement for the actual trees that had been removed during its construction.

<sup>76</sup> This aspect was relevant to the context at Friendly Beaches as without access to 'mains' water supply, water was collected from building roofs and stored in tanks for later use.



to create a barrier between the lodge and surrounding vegetation, as the dry needles' presence increased the lodge's flammability. Despite exposing the lodge to an elevated threat, the casuarina needles' role as sacrificial 'kindling' referenced the counter-intuitive relationship between fire and many Australian native plant species, including casuarinas, that require fire or smoke to trigger the release of seed.<sup>77</sup>

*Welcome's* 'footprint' was influenced by a decision to incorporate the operation of an external door that opened onto the deck. This had the effect of further blurring the boundary separating nature – as represented by *Welcome* – and the lodge, whilst emphasising the conciliatory intention of my intervention. To allow the door to continue to function, the casuarina needles were sliced off level with the decking within the area inscribed by the door's opening.



**Figure 25: *Welcome*, 2008 (detail).**

Incorporating the door's function also provided an opportunity to actually embed *Welcome* with the architecture and use this feature to highlight how interactions within ecologies consist of a layering of cause and effect. Such an interpretation was consistent with my intention to develop aesthetic strategies that emphasised how the built and natural environments exist in a mutually inclusive relationship.<sup>78</sup> In this context vegetation placed within gaps between the lodge's architectural elements positioned *Welcome* as an 'ambassador' for a hypothetical future where the lodge and natural surrounds could coexist in a

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<sup>77</sup> Schmidt, Lars, *Tropical Forest Seed*, London: Springer, 2007, p. 87

<sup>78</sup> A similar concept of mutuality within the built environment was explored and encouraged by the artist and architect Hundertwasser and exemplified by his *Mould Manifesto Against Rationalism in Architecture*. Central to the *Mould Manifesto* was a "... rejection of rationalism [as it related to] the straight line and of functional architecture..." See Restany, Pierre *Hundertwasser - The Painter King with Five Skins*, Hong Kong: Taschen, 2003, p. 23.

state of harmony to produce a truly synergistic relationship.<sup>79</sup> With this in mind, *Welcome* could be compared to flowers in a window box or a 'green roof'; elements intended to soften a building's geometry. Although I considered excluding the needles completely within the area of the door's opening, the decision to cut them explicitly referenced compromises that occur when the built and natural interact, as in the pruning of plants to allow access along a path, or to provide electrical wires with a safe unimpeded passage. Additionally, cutting the needles also referenced the original casuarina saplings' removal that prompted the creation of this suite of works.



Figure 26: Alan Sonfist, *Time Landscape*, 1965-78.

As my intention was to remind viewers of the displaced nature, and more generally prompt consideration for the exchanges that occur as a natural consequence of our existence, the term 'memorial' – as in a device for remembering - is not an inappropriate label for *Welcome*. Despite involving artificial elements (such as the lodge in this case) this process of exchange is as fundamental and inescapable as the chemical transformation that occurs as we breathe. Given this, *Welcome* aimed to present a reinterpretation rather than a critique per se, of the interaction between society and nature.<sup>80</sup> This awareness is of central consideration for Alan Sonfist who sees his works as “... repair[ing] the hole in the psyche which is left when all traces of our biological and

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<sup>79</sup> This relationship is analogous to the architecture designed by Hundertwasser where he combined vegetation with buildings. Particular examples are Hundertwasser House in Vienna, or Rolling Hills - hot spring village - in Blumau.

<sup>80</sup> Unlike the two structures comprising *Stick-out*.

ecological roots are obliterated.”<sup>81</sup> In keeping with this intention, Sonfist's *Time Landscape* (1965–78) sought to revegetate a small portion of down-town Manhattan with plant species that pre-dated European settlement. Like the unexpected juxtaposition of *Welcome*'s needles with the lodge, *Time Landscape*'s re-contextualisation of the natural and artificial opened a window to the past. Despite similarly addressing this issue of displaced nature, the formal difference between *Welcome* and *Time Landscape* represents an artistic, aesthetic contrast, and also references the ecological diversity that manifests as *place* in various locations.

The opportunism displayed in using the gaps between the decking boards to attach *Welcome* is analogous to methods used by Michael Rakowitz to connect his *paraSITEs* series of shelters to buildings, despite the vastly divergent intentions of the two works. Rakowitz has constructed portable shelters for homeless people designed to be inflated, and heated via attachments to the external heating ducts of buildings.<sup>82</sup>



**Figure 27: Michael Rakowitz, *paraSITE*, 2001.**

These have allowed marginalised members of society to access a degree of comfort by entering into a parasitic relationship with selected buildings. Although *Welcome* displayed a degree of mutuality by allowing the lodge door to open, there was also an aspect of parasitism as the casuarina needles made use of the lodge for structural support without actually returning the

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<sup>81</sup> Spaid, Sue, 2002, p. 8

<sup>82</sup> Smith, Stephanie, *Beyond Green - Towards a Sustainable Art*, Chicago: Smart Museum of Art; New York: Museum of Arts & Design; Cincinnati: Contemporary Arts Center, 2005, pp. 120-125

favour.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, with the exception of the area essential to access the doorway, the remainder of the deck had been rendered unusable. In an additional echo of Rakowitz's actual accommodation of the homeless, *Welcome* could be interpreted as a symbolic reoccupation of the area intended to highlight the displacement of the flora and fauna that had 'used' the site prior to the lodge's construction.

Although *Ephemeral Art at the Invisible Lodge* had been an opportunity to further explore strategies for reinterpreting human ecology, it differed primarily from previous site-specific works due to the development of a number of works responding to interactions at a particular location. By focusing on exchanges between a single building and the surrounding natural environment I became aware of subtle details I had previously overlooked, causing me to reinterpret the ecological role played by man-made construction and development. This prompted me to reassess buildings as landscapes in their own right, synthesised with their surroundings. This interconnectedness resulted in buildings (as perceived in the context of my project) ceasing to operate against nature per se. Instead their presence and function was now perceived like a rock in a stream diverting water, or a tree in a field disrupting wind, as the temporary deflection and redirection of natural forces and influences.

### **3.5 Catchment (2008)**

When precipitation occurs within the urban environment water becomes highly visible as it runs down concrete gutters and across roads. These hard surfaces result in a level of surface water run-off that is typically more than four times that expected within mature forests.<sup>84</sup> Building roofs are impermeable surfaces that contribute to this elevated value. At the 'invisible lodges', a lack of any connection to a reticulated service meant water falling on roofs was collected in

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<sup>83</sup> Despite referring to this relationship as parasitic there is little or no permanent damage to the lodge as 'host'. This situation more closely mirrors the relationship between epiphytes and their plant or object 'host' that they grow on for support. Clearwater, Michael et.al. (eds.), "Epiphytes", Australian Society of Plant Scientists, New Zealand Society of Plant Biologists, and New Zealand Institute of Agricultural and Horticultural Science, <http://plantsinaction.science.uq.edu.au/edition1/?q=content/15-4-3-epiphytes> (accessed September 2012)

<sup>84</sup> Swanage, Maureen (ed.), 1994, p. 267

tanks for future use – a situation I interpreted as being analogous to the way natural topography directs rainfall into gullies before being stored in lakes.<sup>85</sup> I saw this situation as being a manifestation of buildings as landscapes, prompting me to extend this notion to a suburban context, where previously I had seen a 'sea' of anonymous roofs clad in corrugated iron or ceramic tiles, they now became miniature mountain ranges redirecting and concentrating rainfall. This realisation prompted me to reassess other features that influenced the collection of water. While watering plants I noticed that their forms frequently assisted the redirection of rainfall towards the stem, as the leaves were arranged specifically to maximise the use of this precious resource by funnelling it towards the roots.<sup>86</sup>



**Figure 28 and Figure 29: Suburban roofs as miniature 'mountain-scapes' and the water directing capacity of lettuce leaves.**

*Benchmarking Birches Bay* is a sculpture trail located partly in farmland and partly in a private forest reserve. The environmental sensitivity of this reserve, home to several species of endangered flora,<sup>87</sup> together with the contrast between utilitarian farmland and native bush, make the site an advantageous location to explore interactions between society and nature. With this in mind, together with a new perspective on water's manipulation by the built environment, I was particularly interested in how the natural water supply had been modified to accommodate farming and other enterprises. Following an initial inspection of the site I chose to focus on the area surrounding a small

<sup>85</sup> This analogy is reinforced by elements of roofs often being referred to as ridges and valleys.

<sup>86</sup> The apogee of this process is represented by bromeliads whose leaves create a watertight seal to produce a 'lake' at the plant's base. Indeed the plant does not derive nutrients from the soil; rather it derives from the decay of leaves and animal droppings that collect in the water.

<sup>87</sup> Fleurty's, "Benchmarking Birches Bay", Fleurty's, <http://www.fleurty's.com.au> (accessed September 2008)



pond located within a zone that separated paddocks from steeper land dominated by indigenous vegetation. Although this pond represented a subtle manipulation within the catchment zone, it was nonetheless constructed with the express intention of harnessing a natural watercourse to augment the delivery of water. As such, despite its small scale, the dam that caused the pond's formation also became symbolic of other, larger constructions within natural catchments.<sup>88</sup> Responding to the presence of the pond as the result of a localised artificial intervention, I sought to develop an installation that also manipulated the distribution of water through a process of active engagement, as a means to highlighting the dam as artifice.



**Figure 30: *Catchment*, 2008.**

The title *Catchment* referenced the installation's function as a device to collect rainfall, while implying a metaphoric relationship between the work's form and that of natural catchments. By using sheets of corrugated iron to 'catch' and direct water, an association was made between the widespread use of this material for roofs and the action of these roofs as synthetic mountains. Although the iron could have been used in its more usual rectangular form I made the conscious decision to fabricate these sheets into oversized eucalypt leaves. The corrugated iron leaf forms served to 'soften' the work, adding a poetic formal dimension with the intention of engaging the viewer.<sup>89</sup> This presentation also alluded to a plant's use of vegetation for directing rain towards its trunk, while literally referencing the mountain and valley-like landscape produced by the

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<sup>88</sup> McPhee, John, 1989, Chapter 1, pp. 3 - 92

<sup>89</sup> The roofing iron's allusion to leaves was reinforced by using green iron. This decision resulted from serendipitous opportunism rather than considered intention, as it was chance alone that this roofing iron had been discarded at an appropriate time for my collection. This aspect did however prompt me to also incorporate green roof guttering, and supports to prop the 'leaves', in order to give the installation a cohesive appearance.

network of veins on an actual leaf's surface. Although eucalypt leaves do not significantly participate in the process of redirecting rain, this form referenced in situ indigenous vegetation, and represented an opportunity to develop an ecological aesthetic by relating the installation's form directly to its location, assisting in communicating an interaction between artificial development and nature in the process.

I constructed the work using salvaged materials from tip shops (and the tip itself) in an attempt to address recycling as an environmental issue. However in addition to displaying environmental sensitivity, there were other advantages associated with this strategy. The aged corrugated iron was not only free but proved better suited to bending than the modern equivalent by virtue of its greater malleability. Additionally, the glaucous, weathered iron surface exhibited a distressed appearance that, in combination with the green colouration, assisted the installation to blend with its location. I saw this partial obscuration as mirroring how natural processes had gradually synthesised the dam visually and ecologically with its surroundings to minimise 'man-made' signs. Indeed, despite its artificiality, over time the pond had even provided conditions conducive to producing a thriving riparian ecology, resplendent with reeds, rushes and frogs. However the creation of an exemplary amphibian habitat was only of secondary consideration to the development of a reliable water supply for the nearby café.

As a means to reinterpreting the status quo, *Catchment* ultimately relied on developing a functional relationship with the pond. By influencing the distribution of resources within an ecology, my intention was to create an *ecovention*, although it could be argued that the result falls short of adequately addressing one of the central attributes of an *ecovention* to "... employ an inventive strategy to physically transform a local ecology."<sup>90</sup> Additionally, the lack of substantial collaboration with the local community meant *Catchment* was also deficient in another characteristic common to *ecoventions*.<sup>91</sup> Reflecting on *Catchment's* role I came to realise it was less an *ecovention*, than an aesthetic device designed to highlight the dam as an unintentional '*ecovention*'. This

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<sup>90</sup> Spaid, Sue, 2002, p. 1

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p. 2

situation represented an often overlooked aspect of the natural versus built environment issue, whilst development influences natural ecologies for its own gain, opportunistic elements of nature can also benefit.

The idea of the dam as an *ecovention* was given currency as its presence *actually* contributed to altering the existing ecology in a noticeable manner. This would more often than not be a moot point except the arguably sympathetic development resulted in a relationship between dam, pond and immediate surroundings that quite possibly increased local biodiversity. This unexpected outcome appeared to be a consequence of the permanent aquatic site and its associated discrete environments, illustrating nature's propensity to fill even artificially created ecological niches. Ultimately, an awareness and appreciation of such unintentional intrusions by nature emphasises society's inescapable link to the natural environment. Alan Sonfist explored a similar situation when he introduced a small circle of unpolluted dirt within an area surrounded by land made barren by chemical pollution.



**Figure 31: Alan Sonfist, *Pool of Virgin Earth*, 1975.**

Sonfist's *Pool of Virgin Earth* (1975) became a habitable space for windblown seeds to germinate, resulting in a colourful oasis of flowers that contrasted the surrounding 'sea' of polluted earth. This situation mirrored the opportunity presented by the pond in providing a habitat suitable for aquatic flora and fauna. *Pool of Virgin Earth's* small scale operated as metaphor as opposed to actual re-mediation, and criticism was directed at Sonfist based on this functional deficiency. However Sonfist responded to such comments by stressing the role personal responsibility plays in preserving and respecting the natural environment, while emphasising that art's capacity lies in generating



awareness rather than actually 'fixing' particular issues.<sup>92</sup> Considering this statement, *Catchment* need not have literally functioned. Instead, the allusion created by its physical presence in highlighting the relationship between water artificially collected in the dam, and the subsequent use of this resource by the farm, was enough to justify its inclusion and impact in the landscape.

*Catchment's* location represented my continued use of marginal areas separating nature and development to create site-specific installations. In this instance the pond embodied a manifestation of development, whereas urban infrastructure and The Lodge had played similar roles in *Rhizome* and *Stick-out/Welcome* respectively.<sup>93</sup> In contrast to previous works, *Catchment* sought to emphasise development's influence on nature by actively interacting with a resource. For this reason *Catchment's* placement with respect to the pond was critical to its representation of ideas relating to the artificial manipulation of the natural environment. By using *Google Earth* to analyse landscape elevations, I was able to locate *Catchment* in a position where the water it delivered would otherwise have fallen beyond the pond's natural catchment. This subversive aspect also resulted in *Catchment* 'operating' in two ways: either as a static installation, or as a miniature, artificial landscape 'functioning' to assist with water collection.<sup>94</sup>

*Catchment's* operation to support a natural process was in part a response to the artist's brief to develop "... [art]work [that] helps us engage with, and interpret the farm and forest... to see it differently, and to imagine more possibilities for connecting rural, natural and urban experiences."<sup>95</sup> I was interested in demonstrating that despite an abundance of 'nature', this forest/farm represented an environment that contained a degree of artificial intervention comparable to the high level of regulation more typically associated with suburbia. However in contrast to a suburban context, the

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<sup>92</sup> Wallis, Brian, "Survey", in Kastner, Jeffrey (ed.), 2010, p. 33

<sup>93</sup> This is because the pond resulted from the construction of the dam.

<sup>94</sup> However even as a static installation, *Catchment's* composition, combined with the use of a familiar item in roof guttering, implied the potential for water transport despite the absence of rain.

<sup>95</sup> Fleurtys, "Benchmarking Birches Bay", Fleurtys, <http://www.fleurtys.com.au> (accessed September 2008)

mechanisms impacting this site were mostly subtle and easily overlooked.<sup>96</sup> To assist with the viewer's re-examination, *Catchment's* presence was intended as a 'marker'; an incongruous, overtly artificial device whose presence encouraged the audience to reflect on the in situ relationship between development and nature. To stimulate this process, *Catchment's* large scale was intended to enable viewers the opportunity to see and contemplate the installation and its relationship to its surroundings from different perspectives. My aim was to prompt viewers to traverse the landscape thereby emulating my initial site surveys as a method to explore the interplay of nature and development from a personal point of view.



**Figure 32: Olafur Eliasson: *Waterfall*, 2004.**

*Catchment's* imitation of an actual catchment reflected aspects of Olafur Eliasson's artistic practice that often involves the manipulation of natural processes with the intention of creating alternative perspectives from which to view both nature and our relationship to it. To this end Eliasson has referred to his works as "... devices for the experience of reality".<sup>97</sup> By artificially replicating natural features such as waterfalls, and exhibiting them within a gallery context, Eliasson prompts viewers to reconsider the *idea* of a 'waterfall' and as a consequence re-evaluate its natural analogue. Eliasson achieves this affect by embracing an aesthetic strategy that has been compared to scientific

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<sup>96</sup> For instance, the preferencing of introduced rather than native plant species, the repositioning of plants to provide shelter from winds or to provide shade, fences to control the movement of animals, or the reshaping of land to control water runoff. In some respects this process causes nature to become *picturesque*, taking on aspects employed by landscape designers - most notably William Kent and Lancelot "Capability" Brown.

<sup>97</sup> Grynszejn, Madeleine, in *Olafur Eliasson*, 2002, p. 39

demonstrations,<sup>98</sup> a reference to his use of unblemished industrial materials and technical equipment.

By embracing pipes, pumps, motors and scaffolding Eliasson demystifies methods used to produce his waterfalls, preventing any romantic or sentimental association with nature. In contrast, *Catchment's* incorporation of distressed material and allusion to the actual form of natural features facilitated the development of a poetic dimension.



**Figure 33: *Catchment*, 2008 (detail).**

Although *Catchment's* collection of water mimicked a miniature, synthetic network of 'rivers', 'lakes' and 'waterfalls', in contrast to Eliasson's artificial waterfalls, its 'operation' relied on the delivery of water via natural processes. This tied *Catchment*, like the natural features it was emulating, into events occurring within the wider ecology, to a methodology that emphasised interconnectedness.<sup>100</sup> With this in mind I was curious to witness the amount of water *Catchment* could deliver. Visiting the site during heavy rain I was surprised by how little water was collected with the small amount delivered being an exercise in tokenism! In this context *Catchment* reminded me of a garden feature – a 'statue urinating' – but lacking any genuine frivolity, instead performing as a reminder of other ineffectual methods employed by society in an attempt to harness nature.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid. p. 49

<sup>99</sup> Image sourced from Kunstonline, "Olafur Eliasson - Minding the World", Kunstonline, <http://kunstonline.dk/indhold/eliasson.php4> (accessed October 2012)

<sup>100</sup> In contrast Eliasson's waterfalls are isolated from any obvious external water supply when they are exhibited within a gallery space

## Chapter 4: Domestic works

As if prompted by *Catchment's* sincere but ultimately ineffectual contribution, I began to rethink my methodology of using a sequence of different locations to create site-specific works. Rather than questioning the success of either an installation's functional contribution, or conceptual engagement with a site, I began to experience doubts regarding the depth of my own interaction with these locations. Lippard suggests that:

Successful place specific art can be made by people who live or have lived in or near the site, or by newcomers, and occasionally by visitors who have really done their homework. But in order to understand the identity of any specific place... [t]he artist has to 'live here' in some way – physically, symbiotically, or empathetically.<sup>1</sup>

Though not responding specifically to Lippard's assessment I had introduced myself to these locations by conducting initial site surveys (my 'homework') to observe interactions between natural and artificial elements. This process was genuinely symbiotic as I entered into a relationship with each location to develop a creative response with the intention of highlighting aspects of the in situ interrelationship between society and nature. However the 'window of opportunity' to observe these interactions was restricted, a condition that was compounded as two of the three outdoor projects were positioned in areas I had never visited previously.<sup>2</sup> Unlike installations responding to static gallery spaces the dynamism inherent within a live ecology preferences an extended period of time to manifest and experience authentic exchanges.

Moving between different locations to exhibit site-specific projects has been credited for creating the phenomenon of 'itinerant artists'.<sup>3</sup> In these cases the artist can literally function as a creative resource for reinterpreting places, instead of producing an object, they provide a *service* creating social awareness by engaging the specific attributes of a particular location to provide an

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<sup>1</sup> Lippard, Lucy, 1997, p. 289

<sup>2</sup> *Ephemeral Art at the Invisible Lodge and Benchmarking Birches Bay*

<sup>3</sup> Kwon, Miwon, 2002, p. 46

alternate perspective.<sup>4</sup> Although not specifically critiquing this mode of art practice per se, after participating in several similarly styled exhibitions I did find aspects of the process limiting. As proposals were essentially 'locked in' by curators – prior to physically creating the respective installation – there was a reduced capacity to respond spontaneously to previously unseen ecological aspects during the installation period. This meant there was little opportunity to incorporate information and experience gained in situ into subsequent works located on the same site.<sup>5</sup> This created a situation where experimentation, while not eliminated, was significantly curtailed. Additionally, due to their respective uses or problematic access, some locations allowed limited or no scope for the development of responses beyond the exhibition time frame. These issues, together with limited opportunities to participate in curated outdoor exhibitions, prompted me to assess similar contexts and relationships within and immediately around my domestic space.

In keeping with Lippard's assessment that a person's memories contribute to differentiating between place and space,<sup>6</sup> one motivation for shifting the focus of this project into my home was its familiarity. 'Place making' occurs through a process of direct engagement; observations that rely intrinsically on the development of a *personal* narrative; a feature restricted when working in relatively unfamiliar locations for limited periods. Having lived in my home for 12 years, I have had an opportunity to develop an intimate knowledge of the building and interior as place. My home is a repository for mnemonic triggers; I possess detailed memories of renovating the interior, altering the internal layout to improve the home's function, together with numerous other decorative touches that have combined to transform what was initially an anonymous house into a personalised home. Each of these activities carries with it recollections of friends, family and locations that, in conjunction with the visible changes, introduce an unseen emotional quality, augmenting objective associations to imbue the home with a poetic dimension.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 50

<sup>5</sup> In contrast to the two other outdoor works the five days spent working intensively at Friendly Beaches did allow time to create a series of responses representing conceptual developments based on in-situ observations, perceptions and experiences. However this methodology contrasted with the strategy employed by the other eight participating artists who adhered to their original proposals.

<sup>6</sup> Lippard, Lucy, 1997, p. 23

The author Bill Bryson observes that:

... [houses] have almost no universally defining qualities: they can be of practically any shape, incorporate virtually any material, be of almost any size. Yet where ever we go in the world we know houses and recognize domesticity the moment we see them.<sup>7</sup>

Using a 19<sup>th</sup> century English rectory as inspiration, where he lived for many years, in his book *At Home*, Bryson explores how scientific developments, changes in social structure and access to new commodities have influenced private lives within houses generally, whilst also relating these changes specifically to his own home. Bryson's method of creating connections between his locale<sup>8</sup> and the regional provided a basis for me to consider the potential for interactions within my home's interior to reinterpret human ecology more broadly. Additional motivation was provided by Bryson's assessment of the domestic as possessing universal qualities, a feature that opened the possibility of accessing my home as an existing discursive site for raising awareness in others.

I have come to realise there are a host of desirable and undesirable influences within my home that unite my physical and metaphysical self with the wider environment. These relationships constitute what I have referred to as a domestic ecology. As if to emphasise the appropriateness of exploring my home, the etymological root of the word 'ecology' is derived from the Greek word *oikos*, meaning a house or place to live, while ecology translates literally as a study of the home.<sup>9</sup>

At the heart of my site-specific works was the development of ecological aesthetics that contributed to the discursive site as a method for conveying ecological appreciation and awareness to viewers. Lippard has criticised this methodology suggesting that "... too often environmental artists fudge and generalize under the illusion that their work will have a broader impact on an

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<sup>7</sup> Bryson, Bill, *At Home - A Short History of Private Life*, New York: Double Day, 2010, p. 55

<sup>8</sup> As represented by his home.

<sup>9</sup> Suzuki, David T., *Inventing the Future: Reflections on Science, Technology and Nature*, Toronto: Stoddard Publishing, 1992, p. 113

ill-informed audience than it actually does".<sup>10</sup> This assessment concerned me because despite the specificity of my responses, my intention was to also reference similar situations occurring at other locations. A 'successful' outcome derived from this strategy required installations to operate conceptually on two levels: firstly by addressing features of respective locations by creating a physical relationship between installation and site; while secondly developing a discursive site that encouraged viewers to apply this awareness to similar situations in other contexts. However Lippard adds that "[t]hose [artists] using local contexts to make more general statements may reach a smaller but directly concerned audience."<sup>11</sup> Altering focus to study interactions within and around my domestic space represented a condensing of context while acknowledging that I was also an ecological participant. Where I had previously responded to observations in an intentional though comparably detached manner, I was now able to actively contribute and affect ecological situations. Additionally, by selecting my home as a locus (a private location) Lippard's thoughts regarding a smaller but more related audience became relevant as I would now constitute the sole member of a directly concerned audience. As such, my methodology would concentrate largely on generating self-awareness.

Previously, when creating sculptures and installations, I made a conscious decision to remain distanced and impartial by excluding autobiographical references. This methodology was employed primarily as I wanted to engage issues that were socially relevant in locations where members of the public could gain access; and, by not overtly associating interactions with any particular individual (including myself) my desire was for each viewer to interpret the installation from a personal perspective and develop a private narrative relating the experience to their lives. However while exploring interrelationships between society and nature in exotic locations it was I who progressively but unexpectedly became aware that nature, rather than being separate from myself (dislocated and remote), manifested as a constant presence. This realisation provided further impetus to focus on aspects of the natural environment from a personal perspective within the privacy of my home.

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<sup>10</sup> Lippard, Lucy 1997, p. 177

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

#### 4.1 *Diversion (2009) and Every Drop Counts (2009)*



**Figure 1: Nature subverting the operation of suburban infrastructure.**

Walking around Hobart I found my gaze attracted to pipe outfalls or drains that frequently represent the only visible portions of an otherwise unseen stormwater network. These elements are made more intriguing as their understated presence contrasts with the expanse and complexity of this hidden network.<sup>12</sup> For this reason the landscape architect Barbara Schaffer has sited drains as objects that “... can reveal much that is significant for city dwellers.”<sup>13</sup> Additionally, as drains are designed to efficiently collect and transport water, the immediacy of seeing errant waterways crossing roads and paths as a result of leaf-blocked drains and gutters tend to inform me of problematic relationships between society and nature than statistics on resource usage or atmospheric pollution. Such observations also highlight how the significance of, and dependence on, this artificial infrastructure can be underestimated. Indeed, the social significance of urban stormwater control has been recognised at a national level:

We need nothing short of a revolution in thinking about Australia's urban water challenges. Two assumptions have dominated water infrastructure in our cities. The first is that water should only be used once. The second is that stormwater should be carried away to rivers and oceans as

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<sup>12</sup> While working for the Hobart and Glenorchy City Councils, tracing portions of the stormwater and sewerage system, I became intimately aware of the scale and complexity of the underground pipes networks.

<sup>13</sup> Schaffer, Barbara, “Restoring the Waters”, in Mossop, Elizabeth and Walton, Paul (eds.), 2001, p. 88



quickly as possible. Neither assumption is suited to a world in which we should judge water by its quality and not its history.<sup>14</sup>

Emphasising our domestic reliance on natural resources, approximately 220 litres of water per capita is consumed by Australians every day within their domestic environment.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, only four per cent of this water is reused in the urban environment as a result of 'waste water' being treated.<sup>16</sup> This situation interests me because, nature in contrast does not 'waste' water – instead it is continuously cycled through the biosphere in a process that connects regions to form a global system. This ability to link the local with the global reminds me of the applicability of René Dubos's maxim "... think globally, act locally" <sup>17</sup> when considering the significance of my home as a place to explore water and its usage as it relates to human ecology.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> From a speech made by the Prime Minister on the 18<sup>th</sup> July 2006 to, *The Committee for economic Development of Australia*. Australian Government, "National Water Initiative", Australian Government - Office of the Prime Minister, <http://www.pm.gov.au> (accessed October 2006)

<sup>15</sup> This figure is for 2008-2009. See Australian State of the Environment Committee, "State of the Environment 2011", Australian Government - Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water Population and Communities, <http://www.environment.gov.au/soe/2011/report/inland-water/1-2-resources-use.html> (accessed December 2010).

Australians also consume the second largest amount of water per capita on an international level, approximately 495 litres/day, second only to the United States of America. See DATA360, "Average water use per person per day", DATA360, [http://www.data360.org/dsg.aspx?Data\\_Set\\_Group\\_Id=757](http://www.data360.org/dsg.aspx?Data_Set_Group_Id=757) (accessed November 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Reuse is defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as wastewater that has been treated and then reused. Only water provided to a customer by a water provider is included in this figure.

<sup>17</sup> Although the originator of this term is disputed - it is frequently attributed to Rene Dubos in 1972.

Grillon, Joy, "Think Globally, Act Locally", The Environmental Informatics Virtual Textbook Project, [http://capita.wustl.edu/ME567\\_Informatics/concepts/global.html](http://capita.wustl.edu/ME567_Informatics/concepts/global.html) (accessed February 2012). In contrast Lippard credits economist E. F. Schumacher with coining the term. See Lippard, Lucy, 1997 p. 263.

Dubos promoted the significance of domestic ecology (interactions within people's homes) because he considered the concept of 'home' as a unifying feature that transcended cultural differences. See Eblen, R. A and Eblen, W. R *The Encyclopedia of the Environment*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, p 702.

<sup>18</sup> Additional social context for focusing on water as a resource was provided by an ongoing drought resulting in the implementation of severe water restrictions for many major Australian population centres. Although similar restrictions were not mirrored in Hobart, the media coverage provided social awareness and reinforced the importance of respecting water as a resource. Despite having access to a relatively durable supply of potable water, residents within Hobart are encouraged to install water tanks to collect water run-off from roofs for use in and around houses. This serves the dual purpose of reducing the amount of potable water drawn from municipal infrastructure for private use while reducing peak loads on the reticulated stormwater system during heavy rainfall, minimising the chance of flooding.

My home, like many other federation houses, is adorned with a steeply pitched roof, a multifaceted 'mountain' with a horizontal ridge for a 'summit'.<sup>19</sup> These characteristics are more likely an Anglo-Australian architectural reference to an English heritage than, as Bachelard considers, an indicator of local climatic conditions.<sup>20</sup> Unlike most houses, water runoff from the rear of my home's roof travels for several metres along an open concrete channel (doubling as a path) prior to entering a buried pipe. When it rains, this channel forms an impromptu rivulet, a situation that contrasts attempts to hide evidence of domestic stormwater collection and removal. I see such an attitude manifesting in the treatment of downpipes where their surfaces are frequently painted appropriate colours to blend with buildings.<sup>21</sup> In response to such issues of visibility and stormwater waste I developed *Diversion*.



**Figure 2: Image of *Diversion's* pipe transferring water from the roof to the kitchen sink.**

*Diversion* differed from previous installations that employed similar concepts as its location was intended to primarily inform *my* understanding and appreciation as opposed to that of the general public. Although a private location restricted *Diversion's* audience to only a small number of people, visitors who did encounter the incongruity of this suspended pipe were prompted to posit the question, "what is that for?" This question was generated in response to unexpectedly finding a visible PVC pipe hanging from the ceiling,

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<sup>19</sup> This formal arrangement creates a stronger analogy for the roof as an artificial equivalent of a natural catchment that consists of mountains and valleys. By using features from my own home, unlike *Collaboration*, *Rhizome* and *Catchment*, I was able to investigate relationships between public and private water, and subsequently personalise the issue of stormwater usage within the built environment.

<sup>20</sup> Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, p. 18

<sup>21</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly a survey of my home revealed that I too am guilty of camouflaging downpipes. Indeed, the most publicly visible pipe on my property that transfers water from the roof to the pipes buried beneath the ground, progressively changes colour from green to white, back to green and finally to grey. This polychromatic appearance, being aimed solely at enhancing the cottage character of my home, is purely decorative and does nothing to improve performance.

cutting through the middle of my home's interior, in combination with an additional sense of mystery created by the pipe's unknown starting point. Although apparently discharging into the kitchen sink, *Diversion* appeared suddenly by entering through my home's rear wall.<sup>22</sup>



**Figure 3: *Diversion*, 2-channel digital video, production still, 2009**

As an intervention *Diversion* was able to redirect rain water from the exterior to the interior of my home, subverting municipal pipes and channels designed to 'appropriately' direct this stormwater.<sup>23</sup> Olafur Eliasson's intervention *Erosion* (1997) similarly subverted urban water infrastructure by emptying the contents of a small rainwater reservoir into the built environment. This action created an impromptu stream, requiring people to reassess their perception and awareness of a familiar place. Gutters and drains overflowed causing pedestrians to be "... jostled out of the discipline of the city grid and into a creative reinvention of... habitual activity."<sup>24</sup> In a similar manner *Diversion's*

<sup>22</sup> Although domestic in scale, the industrial aesthetic of the PVC pipe in full visibility was not sympathetic to other interior features of my Federation house. Letting her objection be known, my wife's complaints centred on the pipe's inability to blend with other interior features.

<sup>23</sup> Due to low pollution levels stormwater eventually discharges untreated into the Derwent River, contrasting with the capture and treatment of grey and blackwater before release. These two 'streams' are kept separate by using different pipe networks - a method preventing sewerage treatment plants being overloaded during heavy rainfall. In turn this minimises the likelihood that polluted effluent will escape and contaminate waterways. Indeed, it is a requirement of the Hobart City Council that these pipe networks remain separate.

Greywater is waste water generated from bathrooms (showers, baths and hand basins), laundries (washing machines, troughs) and kitchens (sinks and dishwashers). Hobart City Council, "Greywater Reuse", Hobart City Council, [http://www.hobartcity.com.au/Environment/Environmental\\_Health/Greywater\\_Reuse](http://www.hobartcity.com.au/Environment/Environmental_Health/Greywater_Reuse) (accessed April 2012)

Blackwater is waste water specifically from toilets. Hobart City Council, "Wastewater Reuse", Hobart City Council, [http://www.hobartcity.com.au/files/2aafd703-aaff.../6\\_wastewater\\_reuse.pdf](http://www.hobartcity.com.au/files/2aafd703-aaff.../6_wastewater_reuse.pdf) (accessed April 2012)

<sup>24</sup> Grynsztejn, Madeleine in *Olafur Eliasson*, London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 2002, p. 84

delivery of unexpected rain water allowed me to reinterpret familiar activities that would normally be conducted at any time. For instance, using the impromptu water delivered by *Diversion* made me realise that I had become complacent by taking the supply of natural resources such as drinking water for granted.<sup>25</sup>

*Diversion's* discharge of water into my kitchen sink meant this resource could actually be used. This not only extracted a level of amenity from water that would have otherwise been wasted but additionally created a situation where I could interact with the installation – a connection that mirrored *Erosion's* incorporation of pedestrians as participants.<sup>26</sup> In documenting *Erosion's* effect on the built environment, Eliasson captured images showing pedestrians leaping to avoid unexpectedly encountered 'streams'.



**Figure 4: Olafur Eliasson, *Erosion*, 1997.**

Viewing Eliasson's documentation made me realise when using water from *Diversion*, I too became involved in an impromptu performance. This came about as I had little warning of rain and I, like the pedestrians, needed to respond quickly.

*Diversion's* 'operation' – the action of using the delivered water – required my presence as both audience and performer. This situation created a dilemma as I also desired the ability to use this interaction for promoting ecological awareness in others. To achieve this I needed to develop methods for representing these private interactions within a public space. As it was crucial to capture this interaction as a dynamic relationship, digital video was selected

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<sup>25</sup> This situation echoes *Erosion* where pedestrians were required to reassess their expectation that they could access particular routes whenever they chose.

<sup>26</sup> The 'participants' in *Erosion* were unwitting as they were unaware their actions were in response to an artistic intervention.

as a suitable medium. Although I was aware of the circumstances behind this sincere yet contrived situation, there was also a desire (indeed a necessity) to convey to audiences the unconventional provenance of this water. To achieve this I developed a '2-channel' video where one camera captured my use of water inside, while the other documented rain falling on my home's roof outside.<sup>27</sup> When developing *Diversion* a considered decision was made to only include my hands and arms in any recorded vision. This was designed to present viewers with an opportunity to more readily engage with the work by psychologically substituting themselves for the unseen, 'faceless' subject – an aspect intended to promote the development of a discursive site.

Rebecca Solnit has suggested that “[i]n coexisting with the real world, art ceases to be a distinct arena, becoming instead a concentration of everyday experience, a moment when the world pauses to let us become conscious of it.”<sup>28</sup> Using *Diversion* for rinsing dishes, washing vegetables or filling a glass with water caused me to realise these types of prosaic and potentially overlooked interactions could actively contribute to generating personal awareness. In particular I considered the amount of infrastructure ordinarily used to either supply my home with potable water or collect stormwater. From this realisation the dual meaning of the title becomes apparent – while referencing the practical act of ‘diverting’, it also acknowledges the psychological diversion I experienced by being able to conveniently (indeed automatically in a virtually unconscious manner) access municipal systems. In this context, *Diversion* became a catalyst for self-reflection by permitting a personal reinterpretation of existing relationships.

Contrasting with *Diversion*'s private location was the contemporaneous 'sister' work *Every Drop Counts* that focused on my letterbox's more public position. I was interested in using this context as the letterbox represented a point of

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<sup>27</sup> This situation represented my first inclusion of autobiographical references. Watching these videos made me feel like an actor in an infomercial, advertising how domestic lives can not only use otherwise wasted resources, but also how their activities can be aligned with unpredictable natural elements.

<sup>28</sup> Solnitt, Rebecca, *As Eve Said to the Serpent: On Landscape, Gender and Art*, Athens (Georgia): University of Georgia Press, 2001, p. 61

exchange between myself and a wider social network by virtue of it being a mechanism for receiving correspondence.<sup>29</sup>



**Figure 5: *Every Drop Counts*, 2009.**

*Every Drop Counts* (like *Diversion*) also focused on redirecting rain water from a roof. On this occasion I attached fabricated miniature roof gutters and connected ubiquitous green coloured garden hose to truncated 'downpipes' that redirected water from the letterbox's 'roof'. By using the garden hose to deliver water to two nearby tree seedlings I was able to introduce a functional dimension whilst highlighting that water as a resource unites the natural and man-made.



**Figure 6: Buster Simpson, *Beckoning Cistern*, 2003.**

In addition to its function I was aware of a humorous aspect stemming from *Every Drop Counts*' use of visual pun. In a similar manner Buster Simpson incorporated puns into his plan for the urban stormwater project, *Growing Vine*

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<sup>29</sup> I was also attracted to the letterbox's form due to its visual analogue to houses.



*Street* (1997–2005). A particular instance was *Beckoning Cistern* (2003) where Simpson sought formal inspiration from Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel painting *Creation of Adam* (1508–1512).<sup>30</sup>

Simpson abstracted Michelangelo's representation to include a stormwater downpipe connecting an adjacent building with a giant outstretched hand extending from a holding tank used for storing collected stormwater. By appreciating this association, rain becomes portrayed as a precious resource, a divine gift to be used wisely. Although lacking any religious inspiration, *Every Drop Counts* similarly invited passing pedestrians to contemplate water's preciousness. The diminutive size of my letterbox's catchment, coupled with the delivery of a correspondingly minute amount of rain water, sought to remind viewers of the necessity to consider our water use in light of the requirements of other features within the natural environment.

#### **4.2 Reflection (2008 – 2012)**



**Figure 7: *Reflection* (image pair from looped sequence), production still, 2008–2012.**

*Reflection* developed out of a desire to further explore interactions between myself and the natural environment by focusing on water use within my home. Although *Diversion* had similarly highlighted this facet, *Reflection* used water from the reticulated municipal system. This development was, for me, conceptually important as it introduced a communal connection with other Hobartian households. I realised that the water from my tap represented a symbolic link between myself and other residents demonstrating how seemingly separate, private domestic lives can be united by their access to a system supplying a natural resource. Significantly, this relationship also

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<sup>30</sup> Simpson, Buster, "Beckoning Cistern", Buster Simpson, <http://www.bustersimpson.net/beckoningcistern/> (accessed November 2011)

represented a physical connection between individuals – including myself – and regions beyond Hobart that collect and deliver drinking water. My appreciation of this connection is also recognised by Solnit who keeps a map of the Colorado watershed above her sink in San Francisco as a reminder of where *her* water comes from.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the banality of the action, turning a tap to access drinking water can also provide an insightful and potentially overlooked opportunity to see and experience how a city operates. The artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles has suggested that “[i]f people can directly observe how the city works, they can direct their actions and ideas towards the construction of a meaningful public life.”<sup>32</sup> In the case of Ukeles' works focusing on rubbish collection and disposal in New York, she invites residents to contemplate how their personal production of garbage accumulates over the entire population to necessitate infrastructure on a significant scale. I saw conceptual parallels between waste generation and the accumulative impact of each household's water consumption that similarly requires the construction of an extensive artificial system to supply the required volumes of water.<sup>33</sup> However the reflexive position I had assumed by investigating interactions, in relation to the public/private dimension in my home, meant I was working conceptually in an oppositional manner to Ukeles.

An example of Ukeles' work is *Flow City* (1983–1991) where she designed infrastructure that allowed visitors ('tourists') to observe the processing of waste. Here, people were able to see how a system such as waste removal can create connections between themselves as individuals and the wider environment in a process that “... enables members of the public to make more

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<sup>31</sup> Lippard, Lucy, 1997, p. 160

<sup>32</sup> Kastner, Jeffery (ed.) 2010, p. 39. Considering Ukeles' statement I equated 'meaningful' to result from an awareness of how one's actions influence the unseen.

<sup>33</sup> In 2005 domestic water consumption in Hobart was approximately 19.43 Mega litres (or 19 430 000 litres). Australian Government - National Water Commission, "Regional Water Resource Assessment - Capital City Hobart Water Supply Area", Australian Government - National Water Commission, [http://www.water.gov.au/RegionalWaterResourcesAssessments/SpecificGeographicRegion/TabledReports.aspx?PID=TAS\\_SW\\_24x](http://www.water.gov.au/RegionalWaterResourcesAssessments/SpecificGeographicRegion/TabledReports.aspx?PID=TAS_SW_24x) (accessed January 2012)



incisive connections with the physical dimensions of their urban and natural world.”<sup>34</sup>

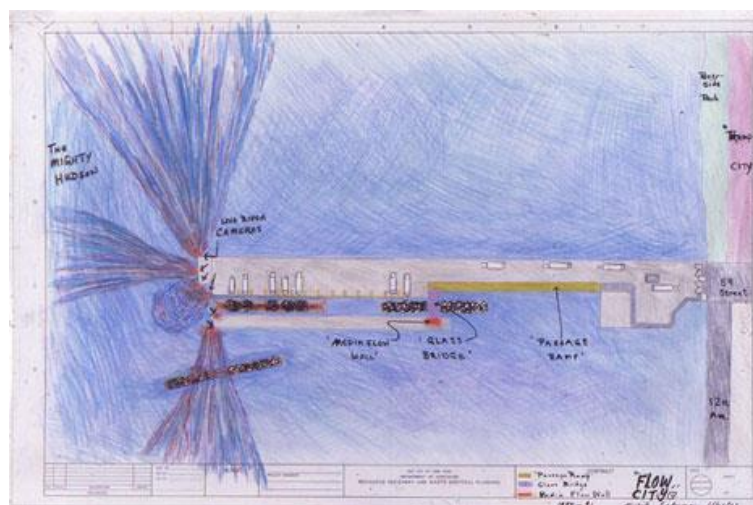


Figure 8: Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Schematic for *Flow City*, 1983–1991.

As the title suggests, the production of waste could be compared analogously to a river flowing through the city, coming from a bucolic landscape and finally exiting into the sea.<sup>35</sup> In contrast to the public 'operation' of *Flow City*, *Reflection* relied on private observations as a means of responding to and highlighting the consumption of drinking water. It is worth noting that Ukeles' reference to her works as social sculpture,<sup>36</sup> linking people within a city by using a shared activity, could equally apply to *Reflection* and its focus on the reticulated drinking water network.

The sight and sound of a dripping tap explicitly illustrates water's presence within the home while also referencing waste through the careless use of a resource. Despite the message of ecological irresponsibility, I was reluctant to use this ubiquitous feature because of a desire to develop a novel perspective that incorporated a personal connection with the water used within my home. In contrast, not only would an image or video of dripping water be the equivalent of a 'one-liner',<sup>37</sup> it would also exist anonymously as an example of

<sup>34</sup> Kastner, Jeffery, (ed.) 2010, p. 39

<sup>35</sup> Additional poignancy is provided to this analogy as barges move much of New York's garbage to the landfill site, Fresh Kills.

<sup>36</sup> Spaid, Sue, 2002, p. 93

<sup>37</sup> A one-liner is "a succinct or meaningful and especially accurate statement". Merriam Webster, "One-Liner", Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/one-liner> (accessed June 2012). The potential issue with using 'one-liners' is that the viewer, by

generic use. Instead I was intent on developing an aesthetic that included three aspects: my home; the external natural environment; and myself. The primary reason for desiring an inclusive methodology was to highlight these three components as interrelated despite the illusion of separation that can develop while living in a highly regulated and controlled environment such as a house.

I considered how water was used within my home, particularly how I interact with it when using features like sinks, bath and toilet. Reflecting on these observations, water was essentially used either for cleaning – of clothes, dishes or myself – or direct consumption. Perhaps motivated by *Diversion* I decided to focus on the activity of dish washing to explore the tripartite relationship of nature, home and self. Dish washing is one of those derided, Sisyphean domestic activities that seem to constitute a chore with a capital 'C'. Such drudgery and routine can neutralise one's ability to consider how these interactions might inform and reinterpret interactions between intimate domestic lives and natural resources.

Further motivation to focus on dish washing evolved from the recent and substantial increase in the number of households owning automatic dishwashers.<sup>38</sup> I see this trend as increasing the level of separation between people and natural resources by reducing the amount of direct physical engagement. Despite many modern automated dishwashers being more efficient than manual washing<sup>39</sup> I was concerned with how *my* interaction with water and dishes could inform my self-awareness. Via incorporating an activity connected with domestic maintenance I came to consider the associated labour as a homage to the resources used, while also embodying an aspect of the spirit contained in Thoreau's recommendation "... to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life..."<sup>40</sup> Consequently, I found that the physicality of manual dish

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quickly realising the content of the work, can overlook additional conceptual connections that can contribute to an increased relevance and appreciation of the context.

<sup>38</sup> From 25% in 1994 to 45% in 2008. Additionally, dishwashers are almost 25% more common in capital cities compared to regional areas. Australian Bureau of Statistics, "White Goods", Australian Bureau of Statistics, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/0/0E43C98B32A7FE85CA25750E00109A1D?opendocument> (accessed February 2012)

<sup>39</sup> This is a complex issue. For more details see Dunn, Colin, "Built in Dishwashers vs Hand Washing: Which is Greener?", Discovery Communications, <http://www.treehugger.com/kitchen-design/built-in-dishwashers-vs-hand-washing-which-is-greener.html> (accessed February 2012)

<sup>40</sup> Thoreau, David H., *Walden*, Philadelphia: Courage Books, 1987, p. 60

washing allows the opportunity for engagement in a process that has the potential to become a conduit to revelation.

Ukeles has used cleaning to highlight the contribution made by frequently overlooked and devalued processes,<sup>41</sup> and has described maintenance “... as trying to listen to the hum of living.”<sup>42</sup> Ukeles’ reference to maintenance as a ‘hum’ carried with it the connotation of an ever present feature that was both necessary but easily overlooked, like the supply of high quality drinking water to my home. Lippard equates society’s access to reliable potable water supplies as being analogous to the “... cliché about city kids who think milk comes from stores not cows.”<sup>43</sup> In other words there is a tendency to see and use the water from the tap and not appreciate where it has come from, let alone how it gets there.

Perhaps resulting from a reverie initiated through the contrived delivery of rain water via *Diversion*, I found miniature rivers, waterfalls and lakes present in my home. Run off from rinsed dishes ran down this sink’s side becoming ‘waterfalls’ fed from ‘rain’ swollen ‘rivers’, while errant splashes of water coalesced to form ‘lakes’. This realisation has correspondences with the writer Rebecca Solnit’s suggestion that, “[t]he natural world... [is] the source of the metaphors, similes, and analogies by which we ground our human acts and things.”<sup>44</sup> However my decision to document the condition of water in the sink after washing up was an intuitive response. Whilst informed by *Diversion* and other domestic observations, I am unable to explain *exactly* why I began focusing on this particular feature. On consideration, I realised that this soiled water represented a detail I had interacted with through the action of washing up, whilst it was additionally connected with me by containing remnants of food, a record and residue of the previous meal.<sup>45</sup> I was also attracted to preference this

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<sup>41</sup> For example *Hartford Wash: Washing Tracks, Maintenance Outside*. Ukeles used cleaning as a method to critique hierarchical systems within the institutional frameworks of art galleries and museums rather than to explore ecological connections.

<sup>42</sup> Ryan, Bartholomew, "Manifesto for Maintenance: A Conversation With Mierle Laderman Ukeles", *Art in America*, <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-opinion/conversations/2009-03-20/draft-mierle-interview/> (accessed March 2012)

<sup>43</sup> Lippard, Lucy, 1997, p. 16

<sup>44</sup> Solnit, Rebecca, 2001, p. 172

<sup>45</sup> Whilst documenting the result of dish washing I gradually became aware of how the change in water colour became a record of the meal - red-pink for pasta dishes, a turmeric yellow for curry, and a doughy white after making pizza bases, bread or breakfast.

particular water as it is usually treated as a by-product – something like rubbish, to be discarded at the first opportunity. By not ‘pulling the plug’ this soiled water would frequently remain visible throughout the day; a feature I would continuously see from the corner of my eye; its presence perhaps surreptitiously influencing my actions. In contrast to *Diversion*, where my role as performer constituted the interaction, *Reflection* embodied an exchange that had already occurred. As *Reflection*’s interactive component was implied, overt references to myself were removed, an outcome that provided viewers with an enhanced the opportunity to reinterpret their own domestic actions through the work's content.

Most mornings after washing up I would let the water settle for a short period of ten to twenty minutes, allowing it to achieve a steady state. The remains in the sink were surprisingly complex, reminding me of the diverse forms associated with clouds and our propensity to imbue them with certain possibilities and characteristics based on their shapes. On some occasions, when the water was relatively clear, and the opening between the foam was conveniently placed, a silhouette of the plug became visible. This ghosted plug came to symbolise my attempt to dam the incoming water by preventing it flowing unimpeded and exiting my home. This feature subsequently prompted me to reinterpret the sink of water as a lake. Henry David Thoreau has described lakes as “... the landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is the earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature.”<sup>46</sup> Although *Reflection* began as a study into the informal results of dish washing, it evolved to become a means of reinterpreting and *literally* reflecting on ecological relationships between myself, the water and where this water had come from. ‘Reflection’ as a concept and encounter also referenced the barely visible ghosted image of myself; a result of holding the camera directly above the sink when taking images.<sup>47</sup>

Although I am reliant on an artificial supply of drinking water, my knowledge regarding the area of its collection was virtually non-existent. Upon request

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<sup>46</sup> Thoreau, David H., 1987, p. 114

<sup>47</sup> Also visible was a thin slither of stainless steel sink that included a portion of the corrugated draining surface. The inclusion of this element was intended to provide viewers with a visual cue to recognise the context as a kitchen sink.

Southern Water supplied maps illustrating the extent of this catchment and I was surprised how far it extended from my home. This discovery contrasted with the statement that only those rivers closer to metropolitan areas are considered catchments.<sup>48</sup> Although irregular in shape, this area approximated a rectangle 120 kilometres long by 80 kilometres wide, with its furthest extent some 150 kilometres from Hobart, near the opposite edge of the Central Plateau.



**Figure 9: Map indicating the extent of the catchment for Hobart's drinking water.**

I was intrigued at how the physical characteristics of this landscape linked it with my home, causing the two to have a de facto relationship. Indeed, considering my home's collection of water for *Diversion*, I now saw this area – a significant portion of Tasmania – as also representing a 'roof' of sorts. To this end, it was appropriate that *Reflection* existed conceptually as a sister work of *Diversion*. By focusing on the catchment area that was my home's roof *Diversion* implied an aspect of self-reliance. *Reflection* in contrast, took similar ideas and extended them out into the natural environment, highlighting the illusion of separation. As a consequence when looking into my sink filled with water I now appreciate how Thoreau's words concerning the depth of one's nature can have meaning not just in nature but also in the domestic 'home' context.

<sup>48</sup> Moore, Catriona, 'Not Just a Pretty Picture: Art as Ecological Communication', in Birch, Gavin (ed.), *Water, Wind, Art and Debate: How Environmental Concerns Impact on Disciplinary Research*, Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2007, p. 388



**Figure 10 and Figure 11: Deciduous Beech (left). Lake Pedder prior to flooding (right).**

Considering the arrangement of open water and surrounding froth, an artistic response gradually materialised. Not only did the body of water in my sink constitute a 'lake', but the amorphous area of 'clear' water bounded by froth *actually* resembled a lake's irregular form. Appreciating that the sink water reflected the form of lakes on the Central Plateau, caused me to reinterpret my sink's contents as a landscape. In these miniature landscapes I could see shorelines represented by a thin slick of oil residue, remnants from the previous night's meal but also an allusion to the lost sands of Lake Pedder. Whereas an orangey colour interspersed amongst the otherwise white froth became the foliage of deciduous beech (*Nothofagus gunnii*) contrasting with snow cover in a June mountain-scape.<sup>49</sup>

Though ephemeral, the 'lakes' in my sink were conceptually little different to those within the catchment for my drinking water; a realisation consistent with Solnit's statement "[w]hen the natural world ceases to be perceived as the scenery out there and becomes the systems and substances all round, we've moved from a mechanical to an ecological world view."<sup>50</sup>

By using Google Earth I could see lakes on the Central Plateau from the same bird's eye perspective as those in my sink. This technology allowed me to remotely 'collect' images while gaining a more intimate appreciation of the in-situ topography. This experience enabled me to reassess the froth again and I began to imagine the white bubbly forms in the sink as three dimensional landscapes composed of 'mountains' and 'valleys'. These features constituted an

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<sup>49</sup> This is Australia's only deciduous native tree. Tasmanian Government - Parks & Wildlife service Tasmania, "Deciduous beech, or Fagus, *Nothofagus gunnii*", Tasmanian Government, <http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/?base=3244> (accessed October 2011)

<sup>50</sup> Solnit, Rebecca, 2001, p. 52

ecological aesthetic that mirrored the actual landscape on the Central Plateau while the white froth alluded to highland snowfall that on melting becomes part of the water used in my home. Staring at this miniature landscape I could imagine flying through the topography, or walking on part of the Overland Track. These associations contributed to a poetic interpretation of relationships between the forms of actual lakes and those in my sink; a link that is simultaneously real but also implied by the formal similarities. Reflecting on my reveries I realised I was developing a personal narrative, a lived story relating 'nature' in my home to 'nature' in the natural environment. To reinforce this actual but cryptic connection, *Reflection* employs a sequence of projected, looped still image pairs<sup>51</sup> as an invitation for the viewer to compare, reflect and re-evaluate *their* domestic life in relation to the natural environment through my documentation of the results of a familiar household activity.

### 4.3 Other inside/outside interactions

A house's structure defines space as being either inside or outside. As a result there can be a tendency to consider the interior of our homes as isolated places where we can shut out exterior influences. With rare exceptions Australian houses are connected to 'the grid',<sup>52</sup> physical networks that permit exchanges resulting in dependant, interrelated communities.

*Reflection* provided an opportunity to develop a visual expression for representing my home's connection to a reticulated municipal water supply that relies *directly* on an unexpectedly large area of Tasmania. Considering services such as drinking water, natural gas and electrical power, I realised that it was only when their supply was disrupted that I came to appreciate the luxury of being able to conveniently access these amenities.<sup>53</sup> Such instances emphasise that:

[i]t may be possible to live with the doors slammed shut, to call a room or a house "home" without considering where it is located, where it stands,

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<sup>51</sup> One depicting the contents of my sink, the other aerial views of catchment lakes.

<sup>52</sup> I use the term 'grid' in reference to the supply of electricity, gas, potable water, stormwater and sewerage networks.

<sup>53</sup> For instance, on occasions when power is cut I become acutely aware of how many items require electricity to operate, and how much I take access to this particular utility for granted. Without power there can be no toast, no coffee and no hot water.

and where we stand... [but] eventually the peripheries enter, and any "house" expands into place...<sup>54</sup>

In this statement Lippard highlights that homes can become a catalyst for facilitating and mediating relationships between occupants and the home's surrounds; situations explored via *Diversion* and *Reflection*. Perhaps more significantly there is an implication that the familiarity resulting from intimacy between occupants and homes *can* become a means of 'measuring' less familiar elements located beyond our respective domestic walls, a process that contributes to increasing one's sense of 'place' from a psychological perspective.

While developing *Reflection* I became aware that revealing conceptual similarities can constitute a form of remapping. Although water intrinsically links the interior of my home with distant areas, through paralleling formal qualities and synergies *Reflection* also became a novel method for re-evaluating relationships between myself and the natural environment. This approach contrasts with more familiar methods of mapping that operate via literally illustrating physical relationships according to a spatial perspective. Through this approach *Reflection* could be seen to constitute what William Bunge referred to as an 'oughtness map'.<sup>55</sup> Bunge proposed the use of alternative methods for interpreting relationships between people and places as he felt these novel approaches could contribute more effectively to affecting change. His ambition was enhanced by a decision to include non-specialist locals in 'expeditions' that were not about achieving an objective consensus but rather "... about building the public's ability to construct its own facts, facts that Bunge was convinced would be more relevant to their situation than the city's facts could ever be."<sup>56</sup>

Bunge's agenda was to emphasise an innate propensity for each individual to interpret the same map differently, depending on their experience and perspective.<sup>57</sup> Such personalisation was evident in the self-awareness generated by developing *Reflection* that facilitated a new appreciation for connections between myself and the natural environment as 'mapped' by features created

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<sup>54</sup> Lippard, Lucy, 1997, pp. 26-27

<sup>55</sup> Wood, Dennis, *The Power of Maps*, London: The Guilford Press, 1992, p. 189

<sup>56</sup> Wood, Dennis, *Rethinking the Power of Maps*, London: The Guilford Press, 2010, p. 167

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



using the domestic water supply. Features such as my sink, forms within that sink, and to a lesser extent other fixtures that use water (bath, shower, toilet etc.) contributed to developing a unique viewpoint. Addressing such an individualisation, Lippard has commented that “[t]he beauty of maps, and the reason they aesthetically approach, even surpass, many intentional works of art is their unintentional subjectivity.”<sup>58</sup> Through the interaction between the map (as object) and a viewer’s experience of features represented by that map a unique interpretation is created. Although Lippard’s statement concentrates on maps depicting physical features I became interested in how this line of thinking could be applied to more localised interactions between the interior and immediate exterior of my home. Despite these actions being aimed at gaining a personal insight into relationships between myself, my home and nature I was also curious as to how these interactions could be used as the basis for artworks to be presented in locations other than my home.<sup>59</sup> These artworks, in a similar vein to *Diversion* and *Reflection*, would also constitute ‘maps’ that could be subjectively reinterpreted by viewers.

#### 4.3.1 *Connection* (2010)

*Connection* explored similar conceptual territory to *Diversion* as each of these works focused on highlighting interactions between the interior and exterior of my home; however, unlike *Diversion*’s use of artifice, *Connection* relied solely on observations and documentation of pre-existing phenomena. Initially my curiosity was piqued by straightforward considerations such as the relative warmth of my home’s interior compared to the temperature outside, or the

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<sup>58</sup> Lippard, Lucy, 1997, p. 82

<sup>59</sup> In contrast to *Reflection*’s reliance on a contingent element, works exploring relationships between my domestic environment and immediate surroundings – though incorporating natural phenomena – were planned interventions, or consisted of the direct documentation of unmodified situations. Although this methodology contrasted with the element of surprise embodied in Eliasson’s *Erosion*, both resulted in a form of remapping. Appearing unexpectedly, *Erosion* provided an unforeseen obstacle for pedestrians – a feature that enhanced its ability to motivate a reinterpretation of the known and create a situation conducive to a ‘Bunge-like’ change. Indeed, it has been suggested that a work such as Eliasson’s *Erosion* can perform as a catalyst, allowing residents an opportunity to remap familiar urban places. (See Grynsztein, Madeleine, ‘Survey’, in *Olafur Eliasson*, New York: Phaidon Press Ltd., 2002, p 84). This last aspect highlights that in orchestrating *Erosion*, Eliasson was not involved in the process of psychological remapping himself, whilst in developing this series of inside/outside interactions I was implicated as both the initiator and subject. I acknowledge that there are many other artists that have employed reflexive remapping as a key aspect of their artistic strategy. Among them Robert Smithson in relating his “sites” and “non-sites”, the walks of Richard Long, and the manipulated ordinance maps created by Chris Drury.

absence of wind. Through windows I could see the wind's influence as it moved the branches of trees or blew clouds across the sky, whilst realising that inside I was immune to its effect. This situation inspired me to reflect on how homes provide protection, acting as shelters that insulate their inhabitants from the effects of external natural forces.<sup>60</sup>

Contrasting this isolation, on the hottest summer days both rear doors of my home (one on each side of the house) are opened to channel the cooling sea breeze inside, providing cross-ventilation of the living space. This causes the indoor plants, like those outside, to sway and move around. Observing this interaction, reinforced that open exterior doors allow access for natural elements in addition to the ingress of people. Drawing on experience with *Reflection* and *Diversion*, where twinned images were selected to frame and inform a narrative, I realised *Connection's* interior/exterior dialectic could similarly be represented by employing two synchronised video cameras, one located within each context.<sup>61</sup> To aid this comparative process, I chose to focus on fern species due to their presence both inside and out, and the formal cohesion this caused. Upon being synchronised I could observe a lag between the wind's impact outside and inside – a feature demonstrating the interior was exposed to the same influence, but attenuated and delayed due to the relatively small door aperture and additional distance travelled.



**Figure 12: *Connection*, 2-channel digital video, production still, 2010.**

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<sup>60</sup> This concept of insulation is more relevant in cooler climates such as Tasmania where generous amounts of thermal insulation are typically installed to aid the efficient heating of interiors.

<sup>61</sup> Developing this methodology to isolate and focus attention on a particular feature also allowed me to make use of a natural element such as wind to remap my home by linking and redefining the relationship between exterior and interior.

Open doors effectively create a 'hole' in a home's wall. I saw the disruption of the exterior 'skin', an act exposing the interior to external influences, as embodying methodological correlations with the work of Gordon Matta-Clark. Despite this, Matta-Clark's revelatory process contrastingly represented intentional "... violations of private space..."<sup>62</sup> by literally disrupting the building's structure through the creation of new and unconventional openings, whereas *Connection* focused on the pre-existing space within the frames occupied by doors as a passage for exchange. Although Matta-Clark also focused specifically on interactions, either among components of a particular building or between individual buildings, I was concerned with how a typically excluded *natural* element could be engaged to highlight an interior/exterior relationship. Despite these differences, Matta-Clark's work and *Connection* were concerned with revealing and reinterpreting the obscured. Indeed, Matta-Clark's incisions have been considered as challenges to the idea that "[b]uildings are fixed entities... and [that] the notion of mutable space is taboo, especially in one's own home."<sup>63</sup> Similarly, *Connection* focused on challenging the perception that the interior exists in isolation from exterior influences. However the irony of Matta-Clark's work, and an additional point of difference, is that Matta-Clark was not specifically concerned with the exploration of *his* domestic environment.

#### 4.3.2 Roof Garden



**Figure 13 and Figure 14: Roof Garden (structural supports and cupboards inside, left), 2008-2011.**

<sup>62</sup> Causey, Andrew, 1998, p. 200

<sup>63</sup> Lee, Pamala M., *Object to be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark*, Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 2000, p. 26

*Roof Garden*, as the title suggests, focused on developing a small experimental garden on top of a skillion roof at the rear of my home. I became interested in this subject as it offered the possibility of supplementing the limited ground area previously available for growing vegetables, whilst also providing an opportunity to literally collapse the spatial separation of home and surrounds. Additionally this action also symbolically referenced the increasingly popular phenomenon of 'green roofs'.<sup>64</sup>

Unlike purpose-built dwellings, retrofitting *Roof Garden* offered an unexpected contribution to the continued reinterpretation of inside/outside relationships concerning my home. Three containers acting as garden beds were constructed from reclaimed timber pallets – an option that was both inexpensive and ecologically sensitive. Although these structures were relatively light, the mass of wet soil amounted to approximately 700 kilograms. As my intention was not to emulate the collapse associated with Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970), four structural supports were installed within my home's interior directly below *Roof Garden* to provide additional support. These manifested as a visual legacy of the extra weight; a palpable reminder of the intrinsic structural link between the buildings' interior and exterior.<sup>65</sup>



**Figure 15: Gordon Matta-Clark, *Office Baroque*, 1977.**

In contrast to Matta-Clark's work, *Roof Garden* constituted an addition as opposed to a subtraction. However these contrasting methodologies revealed

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<sup>64</sup> As a consequence, in many areas of Europe it is difficult to obtain a permit to build a conventionally clad roof; instead 'green' roofs, upon which grass, moss and flowers grow, are installed. These roofs are subsidised by government, as they reduce the risk of flooding and help insulate homes, thereby reducing power consumption. They also help to reduce the harshness of the urban environment by increasing the amount of 'greenery' present. See Hawken, Paul et al., 1999, p.108.

<sup>65</sup> For me adjusting the architecture in this manner also constituted another method for remapping the relationship between the interior and exterior.

parallel connections not normally considered, but essential for maintaining a building's structural integrity. For example the cut-outs forming Matta-Clark's *Office Baroque* (1977) provided viewers with an opportunity to see the building's internal structure, while the visible supports in *Roof Garden* drew attention to the presence of other unseen structural elements within my home.



**Figure 16: Gregor Schneider, *Dead Haus ur*, 1985 – present.**



**Figure 17: David Ireland, Interior of 500 Capp St. residence.**

Although the additions to accommodate *Roof Garden* were minor compared to the extensive modifications undertaken by German artist Gregor Schneider in constructing *Dead House ur* (1985 – present), both were a response by the artist to their respective home contexts. By extensively altering the interior over a long period while still living within – constructing additional walls, corridors that abruptly end and false windows – Schneider's work has been referred to as “... a haunting depiction of domestic memory.”<sup>66</sup> However by leaving his home's exterior unchanged, the internal alterations speak more of containment,

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<sup>66</sup> Author unknown, 'Itinerary', *Sculpture*, Vol. 23, No. 2, September 2004, p. 15

isolation and dislocation than the exploration of interrelationships between interior and exterior. This last point is also applicable to the work of David Ireland, whose practice included interventions within the interior of his Victorian era home at 500 Capp Street in San Francisco. Over a period of several years<sup>67</sup> Ireland sought to reveal his home's past; an activity that came to represent intersections between the history of human occupation (in his house) and his processes used to reveal them.<sup>68</sup> I similarly came to see how works within my home represented a nexus for interior/exterior interactions whilst also existing as a record of my participation as both initiator and occupant.

Paralleling Ireland and Schneider's interventions from the perspective that their methodologies were not necessarily aimed at improving amenity in a conventional sense, my suite of domestic works were intended (at least initially) as reflexive catalysts whose significance lay in the conceptual rather than functional realm. In this light the success or failure of *Roof Garden* was not necessarily tied to its production of vegetables, but instead resided with its ability to increase my awareness of how my home – as a structure – mediates between its interior and exterior.

#### **4.3.3 *Helping Hand* (2010)**

Developing *Roof Garden* prompted me to consider additional methods for realising connections between my home, its surroundings and myself, employing vegetation. Like water, plants (algae, trees etc.) play a critical role in sustaining life. Their ability to harness energy from the sun using photosynthesis (a process converting carbon dioxide to oxygen) not only endows plants with their characteristic green colouration but also enables the production of fruit and vegetables for human consumption.<sup>69</sup> A molecular kinship between flora and fauna provided additional motivation to develop an aesthetic that explicitly represented connections between myself and plants. Whilst haemoglobin in blood allows oxygen to be transported from my lungs to other parts of my body, chlorophyll in plants is critical to producing oxygen. Interestingly, the molecules haemoglobin and chlorophyll are virtually identical,

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<sup>67</sup> From 1975 until 1978. Tsujimoto, Karen and Gross, Jennifer R., See *The Way Things Are - The Art of David Ireland*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003, pp. 36 - 37

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p. 37

<sup>69</sup> This green colour is the result of chlorophyll.



the only difference being that the latter contains an atom of magnesium instead of iron.<sup>70</sup> This highlights that despite a formal disparity between animals (specifically humans) and vegetation, systems used to sustain life are surprisingly similar, emphasising a profound and intimate ecological connection.



Figure 18: *Helping Hand*, 2-channel digital projection, production still, 2010.

Developing *Helping Hand* caused me to reflect on specific aspects that might define intimate relationships between myself and my home. During this process I came to realise that particular features can represent familiarity and serve to transform spaces into places. Additionally, I became aware that the physical contact between myself and my home is frequently confined to small items such as switches and handles that allowed me to *use* the architecture, and that my awareness of where these items are located, and how they operate, combine to produce a unique bond – a psychological ‘map’ of my home relating to function. Further, I realised that this familiarity allows me to make my way around at night when I am unable to see, a manifestation of intimacy that caused me to reflect on my home as something I wear, not unlike a pair of shoes or set of clothes.

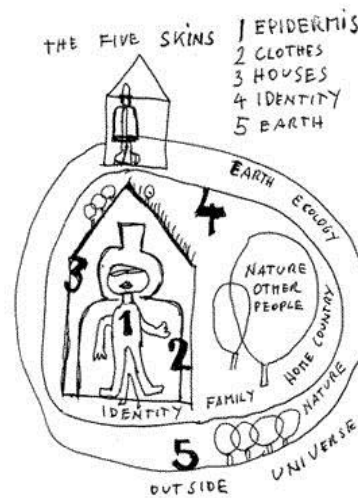
As was my intention, Hundertwasser's projects and proposals frequently emphasised inclusive relationships between humanity and nature, with his philosophy ultimately relying on the postulation that everything constitutes a manifestation of the natural.<sup>71</sup> Hundertwasser's interpretation of human

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<sup>70</sup> Dillard, Annie, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Harper's Magazine Press, New York, 1974, p. 126. Iron is also responsible for the red colouration of blood.

<sup>71</sup> Restany, Pierre, *Hundertwasser - the Painter-King with Five Skins*, Hong Kong: Taschen, 2003, p. 17

ecology interested me as it described discrete boundaries of engagement between people and nature, and viewing my home as being analogous to clothing echoes of his five 'skins' philosophy.



**Figure 19: Hundertwasser, *The Five Skins of Man*, 1998.**

Hundertwasser identified five key elements involved in regulating interactions between people and their surroundings: the epidermis; clothes; house; cultural identity; and global ecology. The first three of these consist of well-defined physical boundaries that Hundertwasser considered as being directly associated with individuals.<sup>72</sup> These three 'skins' could also be seen as constituting a different type of home, combining to define each person as an individual, whilst serving to regulate interactions between their respective interiors and surrounding environment. For instance, our skin protects us from various germs and pathogens, clothes provide warmth and keep us dry, while houses could be seen as a layer analogous to a second set of clothing. Although skin, clothes and houses could be seen as separating us from the surrounding environment, Hundertwasser used these elements to highlight ecological connections between people and their surroundings.

Hundertwasser's many manifestos announcing his philosophy for change included *Your Window Right – Your Tree Duty* (1972). At the core of this manifesto was a call for occupants to employ creative acts as a means to individualising their homes. Hundertwasser specifically encouraged residents to modify their home's windows and exterior to a distance determined by how far

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. p. 10



their arm could reach, and he considered these acts as mechanisms for encouraging the house to literally fit the occupant.<sup>73</sup> Although modifications to my home resulting from the various interventions were limited, I could appreciate Hundertwasser's sentiment as these works had given me a greater physical, experiential and psychological understanding of the interrelationship between myself, home and nature.

The second aspect of *Your Window Right – Your Tree Duty* resonates with *Helping Hand* through its emphasis on incorporating vegetation with the built environment. Hundertwasser demonstrated his ideas regarding *Your Tree Duty* in the subversive action *Tree Tenants* (1973) at the Milan Triennial in 1973. This work exemplified his philosophy that plants and people form an inclusive relationship as a consequence of their reliance on complementary requirements as illustrated in *First Draft of Tree Tenant* (1973).<sup>74</sup>

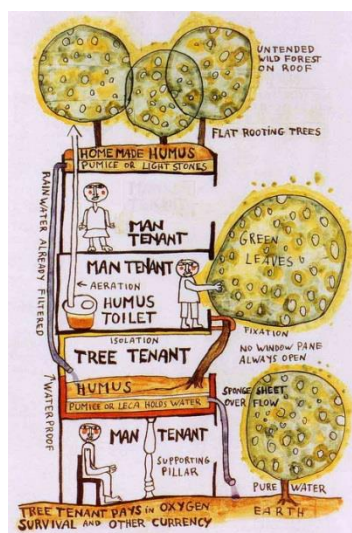


Figure 20: Hundertwasser, *First Draft of Tree Tenant*, 1973.

In Hundertwasser's proposal, human waste would feed trees that in turn supplied oxygen, clean filtered water and aesthetic pleasure through biophilia,<sup>75</sup> thereby creating a mutually symbiotic interrelationship. Such interactions alluded to the analogous interrelationships that occur globally between plants and animals, the animate and inanimate, humans and non-humans. *First Draft of*

<sup>73</sup> Hundertwasser, Friedensreich, "Your Window Right – Your Tree Duty", The Hundertwasser Non Profit Organisation, <http://www.hundertwasser.com/text/view-1.3.2.7> (accessed July 2012)

<sup>74</sup> Restany, Pierre, 2003, p. 31

<sup>75</sup> McDonough, William, and Braungart, Michael, 2002, pp. 75-76

*Tree Tenant* also required that *Tree Tenants* pay for their rent. In this context, *Helping Hand* could be seen as the manifestation of a similar relationship between the fruit trees in my backyard and myself. In this case my care – pruning, watering and fertilising – is symbiotically reciprocated through the tree bearing fruit that I can subsequently consume.



**Figure 21: *Tree Tenant* in the Hundertwasser designed Waldspirale, Darmstadt.**



**Figure 22: Detail of rope connecting door to tree branch in *Helping Hand*.**

Unlike other works exploring the exterior/interior dialectic, *Helping Hand* used a rope to physically maintain a connection between actions inside and an apple tree sited within my backyard. This connection was for me symbolic of the yard's function as a vegetable garden and orchard, providing food to be prepared and consumed inside. Having established that relationships between myself and home are largely mediated through points of contact such as handles and switches, a decision was made to tether a rope linking an interior door handle with a tree branch. In this context, the rope became dynamic – a live link of sorts – as the action of opening the door was transferred and registered by a corresponding bending of the branch. Subsequently, following my passage through the door, the bent branch would straighten thereby applying tension to

the rope and closing the door; a sequence of action and reaction that paralleled the dynamism associated with actual ecological relationships. Additionally, although this interaction implied nature as society's slave, as it might be undesirable for me to have the door closed, this situation could also be viewed as a metaphor for nature's ability to act independently of society.<sup>76</sup>

In an analogue of *Tree Tenants'* requirement for an open window, *Helping Hand* needed an opening in the external wall to permit rope movements and allow access to an interior door handle. By leaving this exterior door open, outside and inside were joined, permitting an opportunity to reinterpret and symbolically remap my home's limits. In allowing access through a door I was alluding to how interactions between my home, myself and nature can be placed on the same level as human-to-human relations. Connecting the rope to a fruit tree also recalled the recent emphasis placed on locally sourced food, specifically the term 'food miles'.<sup>77</sup> In this context the rope became a generic metaphor for links between the domestic and broader environment that result from the transportation and consumption of non-local food.

Mirroring the frequently circuitous route travelled by goods whilst being transported from their source to destination, the rope travelled by an indirect path, relying on other features within my back yard to facilitate an efficient transfer of movement. By employing an exterior door jamb, cherry tree limb and hot house wall as 'intermediaries' I had unintentionally incorporated these elements to form novel connections that symbolically represented how individual aspects are combined to form a system within an actual ecology. Additionally this systemisation inferred that the process of actual ecological cause and effect though appearing uncomplicated can involve the participation of additional elements resulting in a complex 'web' of interactions.

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<sup>76</sup> This relationship also reminded me of my use of twine to support plants such as climbing beans, tomatoes and cucumbers. Such support helps the plants by allowing *greater* growth while simultaneously benefiting me through increased yields - a situation illustrating that artificial assistance can at times benefit both nature and society.

<sup>77</sup> A term coined by Dr Tim Lang. Leach, Ben et. al., "Britain Must Produce More Food, Government to Warn", Telegraph Media Group Limited, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/agriculture/food/6924216/Britain-must-produce-more-food-government-to-warn.html> (accessed June 2012)

The work *Helping Hand* consists of video footage captured from two synchronised cameras, to create a '2-channel' projection representing the two key perspectives.<sup>78</sup> This enables viewers to perceive the interrelationship established between the branch and door, and simultaneously reveals my role as the participant in initiating this sequence of cause and effect. However with respect to the footage of the door opening and closing the framing is intentionally restricted to focus on my interaction with the door handle. This representational strategy borrows from the work *Diversion*, where vision of myself using the water focuses on my action rather than seeking to personalise the event by including more complete vision of myself. However unlike *Diversion* and *Reflection* where the relationship between the two images is comparatively apparent, interpreting *Helping Hand* requires a greater degree of audience consideration. This situation develops primarily from the obliqueness associated with combining the movement of a door with a branch, the subtle motion of this branch, together with no rope being visible in footage of the tree. Consequently, the viewer is required to question the presence of rope around the door handle and why the door appears to be closing automatically (especially when I exit through the door). These aspects, together with the title, are intended to prompt further enquiry with the objective of having viewers establishing the interrelationship between door and branch. By adopting this position my intention is to provide greater opportunity for the audience to consider how they participate in their domestic ecology via a progressive awareness of the situation represented in *Helping Hand*.

#### **4.4 *Whose Home is it? - Plot (2012) and Analogue (2012)***

While focusing on interactions between myself, my home and natural elements I had been freed from curatorial influence; a situation that allowed me to develop works intuitively in response to chance observations. This was highlighted when I unexpectedly discovered ants in an airtight container of sugar. Unlike other interactions between my home's interior and exterior, this moment represented an instance where I had not 'invited' nature to participate. My immediate reaction was "how did these little buggers find this sugar?" A lack of

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<sup>78</sup> A decision to exclude references to intermediary elements was made as I desired to present only the 'essence' of the interaction as a pure depiction of cause and effect as in the work *Diversion*.

any other ants going to or from this container suggested that these few ants, having found ant 'Nirvana', had decided to keep the bounty for themselves. From my perspective, these ants were akin to squatters as they had seen fit to move in and help themselves. Their diminutive size had allowed them to discretely enter my home unnoticed until they were literally caught in the act of taking from the 'cookie jar'. Despite being the size of sugar grains, their black bodies were unmistakable against the sweet, snowy white background; once seen they had nowhere to hide. Considering this encounter Lippard's suggestion that "[a] starting point when searching for community... might be learning to look around where you live now."<sup>79</sup> can be interpreted from a new and novel perspective. Although referring to the human community beyond our respective homes, I took this sentiment in combination with the ant incursion literally, to see with whom I shared my home.

I came to refer collectively to creatures found in my home as micro-fauna as this reference simultaneously conveyed their small stature while acknowledging they were animals specific to a particular region.<sup>80</sup> Initially I photographed micro-fauna as they travelled across floors and walls in a process aimed simply at generating an awareness of their presence. This passive observation contrasted with similar experiences while growing up, where creatures venturing inside would be met with either their expedient removal or extermination. I remember the constant reminders to shut doors, aimed at preventing the ingress of flies, but perhaps more memorable was the sight and accompanying sound of flies laying on their backs in the grip of a fatal paroxysmal attack resulting from a swift blast of citric smelling insecticide. Indeed, high summer could be defined by the large number of dead flies that would collect in the recesses of aluminium windows; evidence of an ongoing struggle to keep nature at bay.

The passive nature of my observations also contrasted with similar survey works undertaken by the artist Mark Dion. Dion's survey projects literally involved removing a small section of nature as in *One Meter of Jungle* (1992) or

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<sup>79</sup> Lippard, Lucy, 1997, p. 25

<sup>80</sup> Fauna is defined as the animal life of a region or geological period (*OED*). Despite its small scale I was classifying my home as a region.

*One Meter of Meadow* (1995), or physically collecting living specimens as in *Roundup: An Entomological Endeavour for the Smart Museum of Art* (2000).<sup>81</sup>



**Figure 23: Mark Dion, *One Meter of Jungle*, 1992.**

Dion's removal of collected material to a foreign context (in some cases literally a different country) as in *On Tropical Nature* (1991) has been interpreted as self-consciously mimicking the imperialistic basis of natural history itself.<sup>82</sup> The irony associated with this methodology is that in conveying to viewers the subject of biodiversity, highlighting the preciousness and complexity of ecological systems, Dion kills as he preserves. Although these actions might appear antithetical, central to Dion's practice is an examination into "... the ways in which dominant ideologies and public institutions shape our understanding of history, knowledge, and the natural world."<sup>83</sup> Indeed, Dion sees the use of devices such as irony, allegory and humour as representing a significant distinction between artistic and scientific representation.<sup>84</sup> This methodology also provides Dion with opportunities to critique the largely technical interpretation of nature by institutions. However in the suite of works comprising the investigation *Whose Home is it?*, I see such artistic devices arising due to the originating context, as opposed to the display methodology or

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<sup>81</sup> See Fournier, Arthur, "Three artists present a different view of our natural world", *The University of Chicago Chronicle* July 13 2000, Vol. 19, No. 19, <http://chronicle.uchicago.edu/000713/ecologies.shtml> (accessed May 2012)

<sup>82</sup> Kastner, Jeffrey (ed.), 2010, pp. 22-23

<sup>83</sup> Art 21, "Mark Dion", Art 21, <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/mark-dion> (accessed June 2012)

<sup>84</sup> *Mark Dion*, London: Phaidon Press, 1997, p. 11 (interview between Mark Dion and Miwon Kwon)

treatment of samples. For instance there is irony associated with the micro-fauna's presence within my home due to its artificiality, and high level of control and regulation. I would usually associate these creatures with the outdoors, living on or under natural items. Additionally, I interpreted my ability to live harmoniously with the micro-fauna – observing rather than intervening – as an allegorical reference encouraging a more compatible and ecologically responsible personal relationship with nature.

With the exception of his *Roundup* project for the Smart Museum of Art, Dion typically focuses on ecological systems outside the built environment, in locations where the condition of nature is perceived as fragile.<sup>85</sup> My emphasis on a domestic context contrasts with Dion's tendency to highlight situations in exotic or remote locations. The implication of his methodology is that the built environment – specifically his home – has little to offer regarding either biodiversity, a suitable context to generate publicity, or to act as an indicator of environmental issues. However a 30 year study by ecologist Jennifer Owen into the biodiversity of her suburban Leicester garden suggests this is not necessarily the case. Over this period Owen's study has revealed a decline in a number of species. In fact, her latest book<sup>86</sup> has been credited with becoming an internationally significant resource detailing suburban habitat loss.<sup>87</sup> Although the intention and detail of Owen's investigation is beyond my own research context and capacity, it does provide evidence that suburbia can support complex and unexpectedly diverse ecologies. My initial surveys had indicated some of this complexity was seeping into my home in a subtle yet pervasive manner, reinforcing how even within my *sanctum sanctorum* I am literally connected via wild nature to the wider ecology.

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<sup>85</sup> United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation, "Human Nature: Artists Respond to a Changing Planet", United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation <http://www.artistsrespond.org/about/> (accessed June 2012) for information regarding *Human/Nature: Artists responding to a Changing Planet* (2005) where Dion travelled to the Komodo Islands in Indonesia.

<sup>86</sup> Owen, Jennifer, *Wildlife of a Garden: A Thirty Year Study*, London: RHS Media, 2010

<sup>87</sup> Brown, Jonathon, "Me and my garden: How Jennifer Owen became an unlikely champion of British wildlife", *The Independent* <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/me-and-my-garden-how-jennifer-owen-became-an-unlikely-champion-of-british-wildlife-2131712.html#> (accessed July 2012)

One particular example of Owen's remarkable study was the cataloguing of six new species of Ichneumon wasp.



The presence of animals living in close proximity to humans is not unusual. Indeed a class of animals referred to as synanthropes have directly benefited from filling ecological niches created by our contemporary human lifestyle.<sup>88</sup> Although it was not necessarily my intention to determine what benefits micro-fauna might derive by living under my roof, a cursory search indicated many of the creatures found inside were also present outside, implying that their continued survival was not contingent on my home. Along with this apparent independence, I also became aware that micro-fauna adopt my home as their own. This aspect was initially a little unsettling as I could accept that there were 'blow-ins' – creatures squeezing under doors and through cracks occupying the space itinerantly – but actually having an endemic population interacting and living largely beyond my awareness came to make me feel like the subject of a sinister plot; as though I, as opposed to my home, was being 'white anted'.<sup>89</sup> This awareness of creatures living in close proximity prompted me to consider Thoreau's statement "... I found myself suddenly neighbour to birds; not by having imprisoned one, but having caged myself near them."<sup>90</sup> Unlike the birds, the micro-fauna were inside, but like Thoreau's birds they too were free. Instead I was held captive not only by my home as an object, but also by the notion that my home was beyond the influence of 'wild' nature.



**Figure 24: Lynne Hull, *Windmill to Raptor Roost*, 2000.**

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<sup>88</sup> Goudie, Andrew, *The Nature of the Environment*, Oxford (UK): Blackwell, 1993, pp. 363 - 364

<sup>89</sup> In the sense of subverting or undermining from within (*OED*).

<sup>90</sup> Thoreau, David H., 1987, p. 57



The artist Lynne Hull develops projects aimed at reconciling relationships between society and nature through the recreation of environments for animals adversely affected by human-induced habitat loss. Hull's interventionist strategy has seen her credited with both pioneering sculpture as wildlife habitat<sup>91</sup> and inventing the genre of trans-species art.<sup>92</sup> The relationship lies in contrast with the micro-fauna's encroachment on my home. Whereas Hull seeks to help, the micro-fauna literally help themselves. Despite our common focus on animal habitats and shelters, I consciously leave the micro-fauna to their own devices, content in most instances to passively observe their occupation without intervening. Hull however, designs and creates forms specifically for her subjects ('clients') in consultation with specialists from other disciplines.<sup>93</sup> Curiously these diverging methodologies result in a parallel aesthetic as the micro-fauna combine with my home's architecture to produce hybrid structures, while Hull's works incorporate a similar amalgamation of natural and artificial materials. An exemplar of Hull's work is *Windmill to Raptor Roost* (2000), a nesting structure synthesising a recycled windmill tower with tree branches to produce a safe nesting site for Ferruginous hawks.<sup>94</sup> A comparable instance within my home is the presence of spiders' webs, particularly in the corners of rooms or around the edges of window frames. In these instances webs overlay the interior of my home to produce an amalgam of architectural styles, a vivid example of nature's propensity to colonise opportunistically.

Hubert Duprat is another artist interested in animal homes. Whereas Hull constructs replacement homes, Duprat allows his protagonists (in this instance caddis fly larvae) to rebuild their own with substitute materials. After collecting larvae and removing their original cases Duprat places 'naked' larvae in various aquatic environments, with each tank allowing access to a specific precious material. Duprat employs this method to regulate and control, while he also

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<sup>91</sup> Bower, Sam, "Interview with Lynne Hull", Greenmuseum.org, [http://greenmuseum.org/content/artist\\_content/ct\\_id-30\\_\\_artist\\_id-7.html](http://greenmuseum.org/content/artist_content/ct_id-30__artist_id-7.html) (accessed August 2012)

<sup>92</sup> Spaid, Sue, 2002, p. 75

<sup>93</sup> Including biologists, zoologists and landscape architects. Krug, Don, "Lynne Hull", Greenmuseum.org, <http://www.greenmuseum.org/c/aen/Bios/hull2.php> (accessed July 2012)

<sup>94</sup> Spaid, Sue, 2002, p. 76

intervenes by deliberately damaging cases, prompting repair by the larvae using materials 'selected' by the artist.<sup>95</sup>



**Figure 25: Hubert Duprat, *Aquatic caddis fly larva with case*, 1980–1996.**

I interpreted Duprat's diverse tanks as being analogous to my home – a setting allowing larvae, like spiders, to construct their respective homes. Whilst Duprat's interventions to his own admission involve an element of exploitation,<sup>96</sup> in contrast I deliberately minimised any interaction, preferring instead to document rather than intervene, allowing situations to develop 'naturally' within a foreign habitat.<sup>97</sup> In contrast to my practice and the work of Hull, where connections are often emphasised via allowing nature to determine its own course,<sup>98</sup> I interpret Duprat's work (despite its ingenuity and beauty) as a hijacking of natural processes; such as the artificial cross-pollination of plant species to gain more colourful blooms or larger fruit. From an ecological perspective the cases of caddis fly larvae made naturally from mundane materials such as shell, sand, bone or wood would be enough to engender appreciation without the need to substitute exotic materials. However the point is that Duprat, though interested in the process, focuses on the novelty of the end product. This contrasts with my own interactions with micro-fauna where the absence of any defined end-point results in a situation where process constitutes the entire relationship.

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<sup>95</sup> Besson, Christian, "The Wonderful Caddis Worm: Sculptural Work in Collaboration with Trichoptera", Leonardo on-line, <http://www.leonardo.info/isast/articles/duprat/duprat.html> (accessed July 2012)

<sup>96</sup> Martin, Andy, "Hubert Duprat: Caddis, Crystal and Company, Norwich Castle", *The Independent*, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/reviews/hubert-duprat-caddis-crystal-and-company-norwich-castle-2313872.html> (accessed July 2012)

<sup>97</sup> This stance did however alter in response to some situations such as the rescue of micro-fauna from the kitchen sink.

<sup>98</sup> Hull does not force animals to use her work.



**Figure 26: *Plot*, 4-channel digital projection, production still, 2012.**

The opportunistic and ephemeral character of *Whose Home is it?* meant an extended period was required to collect a sufficiently large number of still images and videos to produce the following two works. *Plot*, the first of these, consisted of a projection divided into four equally sized areas with each quadrant displaying a series of looped still images. The title refers specifically to my interpretation of each image as being a specific point of reference. Each image combines to provide additional context in a manner analogous to the creation of a map that is literally plotted by combining information gained at many individual points.<sup>99</sup> In *Plot* the central challenge was to recreate interactions between micro-fauna, my home and myself using only still images. Lippard addresses this issue when she discusses how the decontextualisation of content can compromise communication when exhibiting only images.<sup>100</sup> Lippard goes on to suggest a number of strategies that can contribute to conveying a sense of place, including the use of two or more images, or incorporating images taken from a number of perspectives.<sup>101</sup> Considering these comments, I selected this layout as it provided the opportunity to balance high levels of image detail while limiting the unnecessary and distracting complexity caused by the presentation of too many adjacent images. Sequencing images also had the advantage of assisting in maximising the amount of content; a strategy intended to engage the audience by creating an atmosphere of expectation (what would the next image represent?). In turn a sustained viewing time contributed to developing dialogue between work and audience.

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<sup>99</sup> Equally the title could also refer to the area occupied by my home and represented in the images, or the clandestine aspect of the manner used by micro-fauna to enter and occupy my home.

<sup>100</sup> Lippard, Lucy, 1997, p. 180

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

Incorporating dozens of still images *Plot* progressed towards revealing interactions between micro-fauna, myself and my home. I saw this process of accumulation as being analogous to Mark Dion's fieldworks, where he progressively collects many samples to produce an installation profiling a site from the perspective of biodiversity. However, in contrast to *Plot*, Dion processes his samples through several linked but discrete stages, fusing props and documentation to take viewers on a metaphorical journey. I also considered the option of incorporating objects that related specifically to my home as accompaniments to the projection, however as my intention was for viewers to reinterpret the work by applying it to their *own* (micro-fauna) experience, overt references to my home were ultimately considered to be unnecessary. Instead, by poetically revealing generic features including window sills, a kitchen sink, detergent bubbles, crockery, the interior of cupboards, a cup of coffee, fly swatter and dead fly, my intention was to allude to a latent domestic context.

The desire to open the work up to reinterpretation by viewers largely explains why I also considered it necessary to decontextualise the content and develop a format suitable for exhibition within a neutral gallery space, and why my home itself would prove inadequate, indeed inappropriate, as an experiential environment. Instead the gallery becomes a metaphorical 'home'; a space where the milieu of interactions from my home become condensed and the work's content can develop a relationship with viewers without interference from distracting elements.

Among *Plot's* collection of images, two categories in particular are worth mentioning. The first concerned the accidental premature death of micro-fauna resulting directly from my actions. These situations included micro-fauna squashed by doors, stuck in wet paint or drowned in errant bodies of water. As these micro-faunas' unlucky demise exemplified the tenuous and ephemeral quality of life, I was prompted to consider these instances as *memento mori*.<sup>102</sup> A second group focused on interactions between spiders and other micro-fauna. I came to see spiders as lions or tigers – at the top of the food chain – as they were the only creatures I saw killing and consuming others. As a direct result,

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<sup>102</sup> Latin for remember you must die. Merriam-Webster, "memento mori", Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/memento%20mori> (accessed August 2012)

areas below webs became like zoological records providing insights into spiders' diets, while providing a novel indication of biological diversity. This was particularly the case for one black house spider that has lived for over four years on a web within my laundry window. Here was ample opportunity to view legs and wings laying forlornly, a vivid reminder of the lack of sentimentality within nature.<sup>103</sup>



**Figure 27: 'Bodies' and guanine (spider faeces) lying below a spider's web.**

My informal methodology contrasted with similar investigations by Mark Dion.<sup>104</sup> Unlike Dion, whose fieldworks seek to quantify numbers of either particular species or individuals of a species, my aim was instead to capture the qualities their presence brought to my home. Echoing the two works comprising *Whose Home is it?*, Dion's presentation of *One Meter of Meadow* (1995) included a series of images depicting catalogued invertebrates.



**Figure 28: Mark Dion, *One Meter of Meadow* (detail), 1995.**

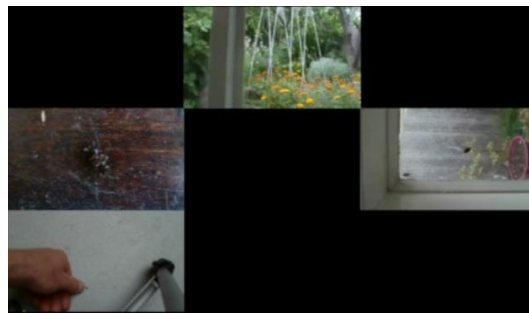
However, while my presentation consists of two projected colour works, *Plot* and *Analogue* (the first consisting of still images, the second video) Dion's

<sup>103</sup> Additionally, owing to the sedentary lifestyle of some spiders, these areas also became toilets. Intrigued by the proliferation of small irregular brown balls I eventually realised these were faecal matter. This reminded me of fruit bats in Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens - specifically how they simply invert their hanging posture when they 'want to go'.

<sup>104</sup> Particularly the works *A meter of Jungle*, *A meter of Meadow*, *On Tropical Nature*.

preference was for monochromatic images arranged in a large matrix where each invertebrate had been appropriately rescaled to a standardised size.

In an additional contrast, Dion's format removed the invertebrate's from their context and placed them in objective isolation, rather than presenting them interacting with and within their ecological setting. While my images of micro-fauna were not intended to replicate objective scientific methodologies, I came to realise that working outside scientific paradigms or pedagogies also gave me the freedom to alter my approach by responding intuitively to new ideas. A particular example of this included the shift from still to video documentation, along with untitled speculative works characterised by intentional interactions between myself and micro-fauna in attempts to emphasise particular aspects, ideas or needs.<sup>105</sup>



**Figure 29: *Analogue*, 9-channel digital projection, production still, 2012.**

*Analogue* represented a development from *Plot* as it explored the potential benefits in using videos, as opposed to still images, as a method to convey interactions. Rather than literally representing snapshots, viewers were now able to experience short videos as vignettes that highlighted (through movement) the dynamism associated with ecological relationships. By watching as micro-fauna traversed a floor, or a bee fought in a futile attempt to escape through a closed window, my intention was to engender empathy from viewers as they gained a more comprehensive appreciation for the contexts associated with particular situations.

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<sup>105</sup> These include: loading spider's webs with wood shavings until they collapsed; placing ants on plastic lids within a sink of water - mimicking islands inhabited by individuals; deliberately interacting with micro-fauna by attempting to keep them in my hands; and attempting to contain individuals within an outline of my home painted on the floor.

Direct interactions between myself and micro-fauna were also introduced to focus on the relocation of invertebrates away from potentially hazardous situations. These 'rescues' focused on the kitchen sink, where in addition to storing water this feature also became a trap for micro-fauna. Falling into the sink, the smooth sheer sides made it impossible for them to escape; a situation that placed them in imminent danger of being drowned. Using a wooden skewer I attempted to gently coax them aboard so I could transport them outside to 'safer waters'. However despite my noble intentions, these unsophisticated interjections also made me aware of how easily I could inadvertently injure or kill. Such instances caused me to reflect more generally on the presence of contrasting ecological perspectives, particularly interventions by society that seek to 'help' nature but ultimately result in harm.<sup>106</sup>

*Analogue*, like *Plot*, employed a gridded format; however the number of discrete elements increased from 4 to 9. Despite selecting this larger number primarily to offset periods of inaction in some videos, by breaking the projection area into a greater number of compartments I became more aware of the 'grid' separating each element. Although this grid alluded to fences dividing suburban blocks, or walls separating rooms within a house, the 3 x 3 format also gave *Analogue* the appearance of a 'noughts and crosses' board. I reinforced this connection by staggering the start of each video in order to imply subsequent 'player turns'. This feature also had the effect of reminding me that interactions within an ecology are composed from a series of interrelated actions and reactions mirroring the subsequent turns by players during a game. This realisation prompted my interpretation of the work whereby *Analogue* came to represent a simulacrum of an ecology; albeit in a greatly simplified form.

Another aspect that assisted with the development of relationships between separate videos was the inclusion of an audio component that captured the ambient sounds as I filmed; manifesting as a coincidental soundtrack. Although initially considered unessential, this 'noise' came to represent another aspect of domestic life that frequently (and surprisingly) complimented the video's

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<sup>106</sup> Although at the large scale end of the spectrum, an example is the culling of African Elephants to keep the population within ecologically sustainable levels, particularly within national parks and game reserves. Rice, Xan, "Too Hungry, too Destructive, too many: South Africa to Begin Elephant Cull", Guardian News and Media Limited, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/feb/26/environment> (accessed July 2012)

content. As each video began, its associated 'soundtrack' would add to those already playing, creating a progressively complex noise. Although elements including introductory music for the ABC news, a clock ticking or aspects of particular songs remained, I came to interpret the more general layering of sound as an additional metaphor for the combined stratum of interrelationships within ecologies.

Reviewing documentation made me aware that the act of observing and documenting micro-fauna created a curious but unintended relationship between myself and the interior of my home. Due to this, I was motivated to consider my responses to the movement of micro-fauna from the perspective of an impromptu performance. When watching animals interact with his home the nature writer Robert Finch considers his relationship in a similar light, referring to it as "... a curious reversal of roles, like being thrust on a stage where the actors are in the audience."<sup>107</sup> Finch's comment caused me to question how passive my observations actually were and I realised that in permitting the micro-fauna to use my home as their own and responding to their occupation, they were modifying my behaviour and adjusting how I related to my home's interior.<sup>108</sup> This was particularly manifest in the additional searching I was motivated to undertake for creatures and their interactions. In turn, this process had the effect of generating a greater self-awareness of connections between my home and myself via my investigation of small, obscure areas I would ordinarily overlook. The effect of this enhanced appreciation of interrelationships between my home and micro-fauna created a situation where these creatures become unwitting teachers. It was as though my explorations made me more attuned to the micro-fauna's presence; a situation expressed by the author Annie Dillard when she recalls "I have just learned to see praying mantis eggs. Suddenly I see them everywhere..."<sup>109</sup> The accumulative effect of these encounters was to make

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<sup>107</sup> Finch, Robert, *Death of a Hornet*, Washington DC: Counterpoint, 2001, p. 37

<sup>108</sup> I considered how focusing attention on them was similar to 'being collected', and reflected on the contrast between this situation and my actions as a child when invertebrates would be placed in a 'bug catcher' with sticks and leaves, to create an artificial home. Although this home was as artificial to them as *my* home, the distinguishing feature was that micro-fauna had chosen to occupy the latter.

<sup>109</sup> Dillard, Annie, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1974, p. 54



me aware that the micro-fauna in my home were more abundant than I could have ever imagined.

Observing these previously unseen aspects revealed what Dillard refers to as a “texture of intricacy”.<sup>110</sup> For Dillard a myriad of minutia form complex landscapes; a concept that corresponds with the progressively elaborate domestic ecology I was discovering. I saw examples of this 'texture' particularly associated with spiders' webs, the creations of the only micro-fauna to overtly build homes within mine. Although many webs were easily visible due to a concentrated area of silk, closer inspection revealed a more tenuous network of gossamer threads that seemed to cover the entire interior.<sup>111</sup> A similar texture was caused by an influx of ants who had taken up residence in an unknown location (perhaps within a wall cavity) as they would form lines of action responding to changing locations of food. I came to realise this dynamic regularly resulted from me inadvertently leaving food where it became an unexpected but welcome bounty. As these ants' small size allowed them to bypass many defensive measures, I was forced to consider where, how and what types of food scraps were left lying around; yet another example of nature generating opportunity for self-reflection.

Up until this point I had considered my account of creatures' lives as distinctly different from wildlife or nature documentaries. Indeed, videos were deliberately characterised by an informal, amateur style with limited focus control and an inherent unsteadiness, while tripod mounted shots frequently included glimpses of this device in the frame. These conscious decisions were intended to introduce a casual and humorous element not usually associated with this genre. Despite this intention, reviewing documentation of micro-fauna traversing my home's interior nonetheless prompted me to reinterpret floors and walls as landscapes; vast flat plains of African savannah or an Australian desert. I became aware that the act of looking at small features on a screen or projection in a detached manner had conceptually expanded my home. Additionally, the level of detail was increased as I could now *see* features that

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid. p. 139

<sup>111</sup> Occasionally I would feel newly formed threads rub against my forehead while others only became obvious under certain lighting conditions. Compositionally, the proliferation of these threads reminded me of fungal strands known as mycelium running through soil.

had previously gone unnoticed. In combination these aspects allowed me to understand and appreciate the geographer John K. Wright's comment: "... the interior of my place in Maine, no less than the interior of Antarctica, is a terra incognita, even though a tiny one."<sup>112</sup>

The potential for micro-fauna to remap my home came as a surprise as, unlike the works *Diversion*, *Reflection* and *Helping Hand*, there was no deliberate action that served to associate one location with another. Instead, the micro-fauna became in situ catalysts encouraging me to see my home from multiple and different perspectives. Hanna Holmes recounts a similar expansion in awareness with invertebrates, albeit in her suburban backyard, when she realised "[e]very step of my foot affects my neighbours. My smallest decision – to mow the grass weekly or biweekly, to cut down a tree, to fill the birdbath – rocks their world."<sup>113</sup> In a similar way I began paying greater attention to my interactions lest micro-fauna become inadvertently squashed; a situation that had the effect of increasing an awareness of my interactions more generally within my home's interior.

Lippard has suggested "... [if] lived experience is seen as a prime material, regionalism is not a limitation but an advantage, a welcome base that need not exclude outside influences but sifts them through a local filter."<sup>114</sup> By exploring interactions using the locational specificity of my home, I had progressively become aware of my immediate surrounds, and how the way I see the world is mediated and defined by this small patch of 'ground'. However my home has simultaneously demonstrated that it can be a place of unexpected complexity while revealing direct connections to distant landscapes. With this realisation I came to see how my home is as much a landscape as a place to reside, and in doing so gained an appreciation for Solnit's suggestion that "... contemporary artists recognize landscape not as scenery but as the spaces and systems we inhabit, a system our own lives depend on."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Wright, John K., "Terra Incognita: The Place of Imagination in Geography", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 37, 1947, pp. 1-15

<sup>113</sup> Holmes, Hannah, *Suburban Safari - A Year on the Lawn*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2005, p. 2

<sup>114</sup> Lippard, Lucy, 1997, p. 37

<sup>115</sup> Solnit, Rebecca, 2001, p. 47

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

The chronological sequencing of works is intended to provide viewers with the opportunity to undertake a 'journey' that echoes my progression through the project as they move through the exhibition. This format also aims to emphasise the transition between diverse creative methodologies exploring human ecology, whilst accentuating the major themes and significant outcomes.

Viewers are initially encouraged to engage and experience the site-specific installation *Collaboration* en route to the Plimsoll Gallery. *Collaboration*, by virtue of having been previously exhibited in Entrepôt, was able to be reinstalled in its original context. Additionally, in contrast to other site-specific works, this opportunity was facilitated by the close proximity of Entrepôt Gallery to the Plimsoll Gallery.

*Collaboration's* location within a separate exhibition space acknowledges its 'bridging' contribution to my research as it links the antecedent suite of sculptural works with the site-specific outdoor installations that followed. As such, *Collaboration* is presented as an entrée to a series of site-specific projects that explore human ecology via engaging features in outdoor locations.

Despite this shift in context, water's potential to connect society and the natural environment remains a central topic, thematically linking *Collaboration* with *Rhizome* and *Catchment*. Outdoor site-specific installations were exhibited for limited periods in areas not usually associated with the presentation of art, and were typically situated in remote locations where the public's access to them was restricted.<sup>1</sup> This combination of factors resulted in the use of documentation, consisting of images captured in situ, as a mechanism for representing the actual installations within the exhibition. Considering this aspect, and by experiencing *Collaboration* first, my intention is for viewers to gain a physical appreciation for aesthetic strategies employed in other site-specific works that are only able to be engaged through photographic documentation.

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<sup>1</sup> The exception to this was *Rhizome's* suburban location adjacent to the Hobart Rivulet.

As the five outdoor site-specific works similarly focus on an exchange across boundaries separating natural and artificial features, they are arranged in close proximity. By locating the images of these works – *Rhizome*, *Stick-out* (construction 1), *Stick-out* (construction 2), *Welcome* and *Catchment* – along a narrow corridor, my intention is to create an intimate space where viewers are encouraged to closely examine the content of each image. I also intend to provide viewers with an opportunity to appreciate and contemplate the significance of each installation's relationship to its surroundings. By scaling and spacing documentation for each installation equidistantly along the corridor, my intention is to reinforce the common themes and set up objective points of comparison.

This exhibition contains works that can be divided into two broad categories: works installed site-specifically in other locations; and works developed in and for my home. With this in mind, entering the main gallery space along a corridor mnemonically references the actual hallway leading from my home's front door, to those rooms where I explored the interactions between myself and elements of nature within my domestic environment. Extending this analogy, the gallery corridor leads viewers to a series of 'rooms' that allude to the rooms within an actual home, where the works derived from my domestic interactions - *Diversion*, *Reflection*, *Helping Hand*, *Plot* and *Analogue* - are exhibited. Moving through this series of connected spaces the viewer progressively encounters works that explore interactions between natural elements, myself, and my home.

Motivated by a desire to contribute to the discourse on human ecology, my research seeks to emphasise the permanent relationship between society and nature. By selecting an approach that highlights environmental exchanges, as opposed to addressing environmental issues per se, my methodology constitutes an exploration and examination of co-existence rather than separation. Reinforcing this intention, works are developed to resist embodying a judgemental stance; instead emphasis is placed on creating works determined or designed to reinterpret ecological connections in order to provide alternate perspectives of familiar situations.

In the context of my project sculpture has been engaged as a method to explore relationships within the built environment, particularly interactions between natural forms such as trees and constructed elements. These exchanges suggest and manifest moments of ecological balance; a concept reinterpreted literally in *Balance* where a tree limb and picket fence's mutually supportive 'embrace' alludes directly to society and nature's interrelationship. *Balance* also raised the significance of incorporating recognisable elements, such as fence pickets to engage viewers, whilst developing my appreciation for static sculpture's capacity to suggest process. Extending on this idea, the sculpture *Plantation* represents process by incorporating the same material in different states and forms, implying the material's transformation via a series of operations. This was formally realised by combining limb wood, dressed timber and timber shavings, enabling me to address the conversion of raw materials into products, while simultaneously drawing attention to the generation of waste as a by-product.

Having made a conscious decision to refrain from representing human ecology in a didactic manner, it became necessary to develop poetic, symbolic and metaphoric relationships in order to convey an awareness of interrelationships between people and their surroundings, to viewers. These representational devices manifested physically in sculptures as contrasting surface finishes, the juxtaposition of natural with synthetic materials, and the creation of formal arrangements that implied interdependence. Through developing these aspects I gained an appreciation for the possibility of treading an aesthetic 'middle ground' that avoided sentimentalising nature, preferring instead to emphasise human ecology as a collaboration with nature.

Although satisfied the sculpture I was developing embodied and evoked the interrelationship that is human ecology, I gradually realised the absence of physical engagement between my sculptures, and the sources of their inspiration, could limit their contribution to social discourse. Considering observations made while documenting in situ interactions I became aware that by incorporating their surroundings these situations possessed a subtlety that caused my object based sculptural responses to appear comparatively clumsy; indeed 'one-dimensional' in comparison.

When walking along the edges of development beside rivulets, behind suburban backyards or along the shores of the Derwent River, I realised these areas possessed a certain tension caused by the competing 'interests' of development and nature. Here, in these peri-urban zones located at the interface between the natural and artificial, exchanges were frequently emphasised due to the presence of incongruous man-made elements. However in contrast to my sculptures, these interactions were initiated via an innate dynamism that highlighted the inclusive relationship between nature and society. This appreciation prompted me to discover and assess additional methods for representing human ecology.

Developing site-specific installations revealed that, through the process of exploring, 'reading' and responding directly to and in locations, I was participating as a resource in my own right. I gained an appreciation that the choice of location, formal composition and scale employed for these installations became a manifestation of experiences gained during my encounters. Lucy Lippard's and Miwon Kwon's writing regarding the differentiation between space and place, and the interpretation of different 'sites' as they relate to site-specific works, were two theories that directly informed my aesthetic decisions. Additionally, the process of reflecting on each installation's development and execution allowed me to gain an understanding of how this process manifests, an outcome that assisted the creation of subsequent installations. I can vividly remember observations that inspired creative responses: the presence of PVC pipe outfalls adjacent to the Hobart Rivulet; stumps indicating the removal of casuarinas growing too close to lodges at Friendly Beaches; and the subtle but artificial interventions to manipulate the distribution of rain water at Birches Bay. I realised that observing and reinterpreting these interactions contributed to my personalisation of each location – constituting 'place making' in a Lippardian sense – whilst they subsequently and collectively combined to transform my perception of the human/nature relationship. Perhaps most significantly though, these exhibition opportunities provided the development of 'templates' for engaging locations that I will continue to employ in the future.

Kwon's principle of site-multiplicity to generate phenomenological, institutional and discursive sites, allowed me to appreciate that my responses could be

interpreted by viewers on a number of levels. This aspect manifested particularly with regard to how my site-specific installation's engagement with their locations, and allusion to environmental issues, influenced the development of a discursive site, prompting me to consider how my aesthetic choices could serve to convey ideas. Central to my communication strategy is the inclusion of readily identifiable materials and items that possess recognisable functions. *Collaboration* enhances its discursive site by emphasising the functional similarity shared by trees and PVC pipes, while *Rhizome* employs a similar analogy combined with its placement specifically determined to incorporate the surroundings as a physical and conceptual extension. Creating a literal connection between *Rhizome* and its context evokes the Hobart Rivulet as a nexus for natural and artificial catchments, while inviting viewers to question their own perspective in relation to this familiar hybrid system. Additionally, the visibility of this pipe arrangement alludes to the *support* provided for development's expansion by a largely unseen system of pipes and their analogous relationship to the spread of certain invasive plant species. These conceptual connections further developed my appreciation for site-specific work's ability to engage and represent interactions in a manner that transcended object-based sculpture located within a gallery environment.

During my research I became aware of parallels between the development of a discursive site and the practice of ecological aesthetics as visual strategies for communicating connections. My understanding of ecological aesthetics prompted responses to sites that incorporated natural and artificial elements to highlight interrelationships. This manifested stylistically in *Rhizome* as a 'bridge' spanning the rivulet to symbolically mediate between society and the natural environment. Although this formal device features again in *Stick-out* and *Welcome*, these works focused on natural elements that had been removed as a direct result of a construction and as such constituted an ecological aesthetic of restoration. *Catchment's* form also alluded to an alternate 'bridge' permitting the transfer of a resource (water) from one catchment to another.

By actively engaging in the local ecology – albeit in a small way to redistribute rain water – *Catchment* referenced the functional operation of *ecoventions* while also alluding to the local, artificial interventions that consciously and unconsciously manipulate natural systems. Applying these diverse approaches

to human ecology allowed me to 'test' and experience how alternate strategies could reveal interactions that are for the most part obscured or go unnoticed due to their modest scale or banality.

Throughout this research individual projects directly informed the development of subsequent works in a process that continually altered my perception and understanding. Direct observations, in combination with the experience gained through each installation, developed my awareness that water's dynamism, coupled with its familiarity, create a manifold of possibilities for exploring connections between society and nature, myself, and the natural environment. I also perceived the ubiquitous presence of water as a mechanism for linking individuals within community contexts. This appreciation opened up the possibility of using my personal experiences to inform others and provided an incentive to change my methodology, from focusing on exchanges occurring in exotic locations, to concentrating on relationships between myself and nature, as mediated through my home.

Artists who engage their homes often explore interactions primarily between themselves, or others, and the architecture. In response to the current environmental discourse, I saw references to nature and the way it infiltrates and connects the artist's home to the wider environment as an opportunity for me to explore human ecology from a novel, but relevant, perspective.

Additionally, having realised the etymological origin of ecology is *oikos*, meaning a house or place to live, added poignancy to the use of one's home as a place through and from which to study and experience environmental interactions.

In contrast to my public installations, the investigations focusing on my home were aimed primarily at generating self-awareness and increasing *my* appreciation and understanding of nature's role within this (for me) most familiar of places. For this reason I came to see works incorporating domestic features as a foil for installations in exotic locations. Though each context similarly reinterprets and frames the local human ecology, the amount of time spent within my home contrasts the relatively brief engagement with other sites. This authentic belonging allowed the inclusion of nuanced aspects and details that more condensed durations would have overlooked.



*Catchment's* interventional approach, using corrugated iron roofing, prompted an exploration of how water from my home's roof could be employed as a creative resource. *Diversion's* reliance on my home's architecture for its water contrasts with *Reflection's* focus on the municipal water supply. *Reflection's* particular contribution results from its metaphoric use of features present in dish washing water residue, to make poetic associations between domestic water use, and the area of this water's collection. Linking these attributes raises the potential for my home to be remapped with respect to elements within the broader ecology. This in turn renders the perception of my home's interior (a place isolated from the wider environment) as an illusion and simultaneously raises the point that with regard to certain resources, my home actually represents a nexus.

The private location of these interactions resulted in documentation becoming a mode for recording that evolved directly into content for developing creative responses. In this context, whilst documentation of my site-specific installations was intended as records of the work in situ, my domestic documentations were reworked as artworks in their own right. Issues concerning representation provided an opportunity to employ digital imagery to develop and convey my ideas. One outcome of this approach, as exemplified in *Helping Hand* and *Diversion*, was the use of 'twinning' video images as a technique to relate cause and effect, as embodied by my home's interior and exterior. This also prompted experimentation with the gridded format employed in *Plot* and *Analogue* to provide a sense of interaction, while emulating the layering and complexity present within actual ecological systems. The development of domestic works also activated the process of producing videos and images as performances where my impromptu reaction to a sudden shower of rain, or the unexpected presence/actions of micro-fauna resulted in them becoming the 'stars'. Despite being responsible for directing the camera, these responses arose through elements acting independently in and of their own volition with the outcome being a collaboration between myself and the actions of wild nature.

In addition to the presentation of works referencing aspects of an ecology's operation, it became evident that the conceptual interrelationships between works developed a creative ecology in its own right. This process and

perspective provided further encouragement to focus the exhibition on the domestic suite of works.

By presenting a number of these works together, my intention was to produce an 'environment' emulating the occupant's experiences within an actual house to assist the creation of a discursive site. This process is further enhanced by the use of familiar activities that result in *my* interactions becoming an invitation that cause viewers to reflect on *their* domestic contexts and activities, and so reinterpret that content from a personalised perspective.

Discovering and engaging an unexpected level of ecological complexity within my home – specifically in relation to the cohabitation of micro-fauna – suggested the explorations of exotic locations had been perhaps superfluous for experiencing socially significant interactions between natural and artificial elements. This ironic outcome reinforces the philosopher Jean François Lyotard's comment that “[t]he truth is local”.<sup>2</sup> The realisation that my interactions in a private setting were also applicable to others, enabled me to appreciate that human ecology arises primarily via people as opposed to society's artificial constructions.

Finding my home as a place *par excellence* allowed reflection on Lippard's assessment that artists require a form of transportable 'place', and to be “centred and grounded”<sup>3</sup> in this place if their resulting site-specific works are going to effectively engage the specificity of other locations. Considering Lippard's comment, my research progressed in an inverted fashion by looking firstly at a series of locations where I had only a limited degree of familiarity, prior to focusing on my home. However by observing interactions within the intimacy of my home I came to realise that *I* also constituted a place, a location interacting with my surroundings, both physically and psychologically. Considering this outcome, it is perhaps unsurprising yet ironic, that my intention to convey an awareness of ecological considerations to others had actually served to produce this unexpected reflexivity; an awareness of myself as a collaborator with nature.

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<sup>2</sup> Solnit, Rebecca, 2001, p. 56

<sup>3</sup> Lippard, Lucy, 1997, p 289

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## List of Figures

### Chapter 1

Figure 1: Dean Chatwin, *Symbiosis?*, 2006, copper pipe, poplar suckers, 345 x 215 x 230 (h) cm.

### Chapter 2

Figure 1: Image of tree roots in streetscape cracking asphalt.

Figure 2: Image of tree trimmed to allow traffic and power lines to pass.

Figure 3: Image of tree missing awning cut-outs in North Sydney.

Figure 4: Renzo Piano, Richard Rodgers and Peter Rice, *The Centre Georges Pompidou*, 1977. Image sourced from Gard Karlsen, "Trip to Paris, France - April 2006", Gard Karlsen, [http://gardkarlsen.com/Paris\\_France.htm](http://gardkarlsen.com/Paris_France.htm) (accessed October 2012).

Figure 5: Image of gravel in abruptly terminated gutter.

Figure 6: Image of soil washed over footpath.

Figure 7: Image of tree breaking fence.

Figure 8: Zoe Leonard, *Tree + Fence, out my backwindow*, 1998, silver gelatine print, 42 x 28 cm. Image sourced from Art Tattler International, "Zoe Leonard's Observations in the Present from a Particular Point of View", Art Tattler International, <http://arttattler.com/archivezoeleonard.html> (accessed October 2012).

Figure 9: Image of abbreviated fence to accommodate tree.

Figure 10: Dean Chatwin, *Balance* (front view), 2007, eucalypt limb, treated pine, 100 x 100 x 215 (h) cm.

Figure 11: Dean Chatwin, *Balance* (rear view), 2007, eucalypt limb, treated pine, 100 x 100 x 215 (h) cm.

Figure 12: Image of tree used as gate post.

Figure 13: Image of architectural feature attached to houses near Kingston.

Figure 14: Dean Chatwin, *Stand*, 2007, dressed eucalyptus timber, eucalypt leaves, (2 elements) 28 x 28 x 105 (h) cm and 18 x 25 x 160 (h) cm.

Figure 15: Roxy Paine, *Palimpsest*, 2004, stainless steel, concrete, 630 x 840 (h) cm. Image sourced from I Heart My Art, "Archive", I Heart My Art, <http://www.iheartmyart.com/post/296885653/roxy-paine-palimpsest-2004-stainless-steel-26> (accessed October 2012).

Figure 16: *Plantation*, 2007, radiata pine limb wood, dressed pine, pine shavings, 100 x 100 x 125 (h) cm.

Figure 17: Experimental ecology using cages. Image sourced from Miller, Luke, "How to Make Durable Cages for Intertidal experiments", Luke Miller <http://www.lukemiller.org/journal/2006/04/how-to-make-durable-cages-for.html> (accessed October 2012).

Figure 18: Dean Chatwin, *Mesh*, 2007, galvanised mesh, dressed eucalyptus timber, eucalypt limb wood, 20 x 20 x 65 (h) cm.

Figure 19: Dean Chatwin, *Machine*, 2007, salvaged pine, cardboard, eucalypt limb wood, 90 x 185 x 115 (h) cm.

Figure 20: Martin Puryear, *Desire*, 1981, pine, red cedar, poplar, Sitka spruce, 975 x 487 (h) cm. Image sourced from Rivera, Jessica, "Martin Puryear at The Whitney Museum of American Art", Advanced Art Manhattan, <http://www.advancedart.org/art-journal/2011/4/19/martin-puryear-at-the-whitney-museum-of-american-art.html> (accessed October 2012)

### Chapter 3

Figure 1: Dean Chatwin, *Collaboration* (detail), 2007, PVC pipe, polar tree, site-specific installation.

Figure 2: Image of PVC pipe extending from Entrepôt Lounge Gallery floor.

Figure 3: Dean Chatwin, *Collaboration* (detail), 2007, PVC pipe, polar tree, site-specific installation. Image detailing view of installation through windows from outside the gallery space.

Figure 4: Antony Gormley, *Event Horizon*, 2007, 27 fibreglass and 4 cast iron figures, site-specific installation. Image sourced from designboom, "antony gormley: event horizon new York", designboom, <http://www.designboom.com/art/antony-gormley-event-horizon-new-york/> (accessed November 2012)

Figure 5: Schematic diagram illustrating the water or hydrologic cycle. Image sourced from Live from Earth and Mars, "The Water Cycle", Live from Earth and Mars, [http://www.k12.atmos.washington.edu/k12/pilot/water\\_cycle/grabber2.html](http://www.k12.atmos.washington.edu/k12/pilot/water_cycle/grabber2.html) (accessed October 2012).

Figure 6: Dean Chatwin, *Collaboration* (detail), 2007, PVC pipe, polar tree, site-specific installation. Image detailing method used to connect PVC pipe to the poplar trees.

Figure 7: Dean Chatwin, *Collaboration* (detail), 2007, PVC pipe, polar tree, site-specific installation. Image detailing method used to connect the poplar trees to the ceiling joists.

Figure 8: Image of poplar tree stand adjacent to the Midlands Highway, Tasmania, indicating their propensity to spread via suckering.

Figure 9: Image emphasising the typically abrupt change between suburban development and native vegetation in Hobart; a situation that results in a compressed peri-urban zone.

Figure 10: Image of storm water PVC pipe outfall adjacent to the Hobart Rivulet.

Figure 11: Dean Chatwin, *Rhizome* (detail), 2008, PVC pipe, willow branch, site-specific installation.

Figure 12: Dean Chatwin, *Rhizome* (detail), 2008, PVC pipe, willow branch, site-specific installation.

Figure 13: Michaelie Crawford and Jennifer Turpin, *The Memory Line*, 1996, rye grass, site-specific installation, Image sourced from Healthy Waterways, "The Fluid Artworks of Jennifer Turpin and Michaelie Crawford", Healthy Waterways, <http://waterbydesign.com.au/jenniferturpin/> (accessed October 2012).

Figure 14: Dean Chatwin, *Rhizome*, 2008, PVC pipe, Willow branch, site-specific installation. Aerial view of installation. Image sourced from *Google Earth*.

Figure 15: Image of industrial remains beside the Hobart Rivulet.

Figure 16: Image of Lodge at Friendly Beaches indicating how the timber has weathered over time to a colour that blends more with the surroundings.

Figure 17: Image of the cleared zone separating the Lodge from the surrounding vegetation and image of thin peri-urban zone surrounding suburban Hobart.

Figure 18: Dean Chatwin, *Stick-out* (construction 1), 2008, dressed casuarina timber, screws, 165 x 95 x 160 (h) cm. And image of *Stand*, 2007, to allow formal comparisons between the two works.

Figure 19: Image of "duckboard" walkway surrounded by native vegetation.

Figure 20: Dean Chatwin, *Stick-out* (construction 1, detail), 2008, dressed casuarina timber, screws, 165 x 95 x 160 (h) cm.

Figure 21: Dean Chatwin, *Stick-out* (construction 2, detail), 2008, dressed casuarina timber, screws, 155 x 160 x 215 (h) cm.

Figure 22: Dean Chatwin, *Stick-out* (construction 2, detail), 2008, dressed casuarina timber, screws, 155 x 160 x 215 (h) cm.

Figure 23: Dean Chatwin, *Welcome*, 2008, casuarina needles (phylodes), 180 x 180 x 25 (h) cm.

Figure 24: Image illustrating the linearity of a tree plantation. Image sourced from Albany Plantation Forest Company of Australia Pty Ltd, "Company Profile", Albany Plantation Forest Company of Australia Pty Ltd <http://www.apfl.com.au/AboutUs/apflcomprof.aspx> (accessed October 2012). And; Dean Chatwin, *Welcome* (detail), 2008, casuarina needles (phylodes), 180 x 180 x 25 (h) cm.

Figure 25: Dean Chatwin, *Welcome* (detail), 2008, casuarina needles (phylodes), 180 x 180 x 25 (h) cm.

Figure 26: Alan Sonfist, *Time Landscape*, 1965-1978, indigenous tree species, 12 x 75 x 15 (h) m. Image sourced from Alan Sonfist, "Time Landscape", Alan Sonfist, <http://www.alansonfist.com/projects/project.html?time-landscape> (accessed October 2012).



Figure 27: Michael Rakowitz, *paraSITE*, 2001, plastic bags, waterproof tape, 600 x 120 x 80 (h) cm. Image sourced from Lisa Dillin, "Sculpture: Media and Process", Lisa Dillin, <http://sculptureoverview.blogspot.com.au/2011/11/17-architectural.html> (accessed October 2012).

Figure 28: Image of suburban roofs.

Figure 29: Image of the water directing capacity of lettuce leaves.

Figure 30: Dean Chatwin, *Catchment*, 2008, corrugated roofing iron, metal guttering, steel, site-specific installation.

Figure 31: Alan Sonfist, *Pool of Virgin Earth*, 1975, earth, seeds, 1525 cm diameter. Image sourced from Schuylkill Centre (The), "Archive", The Schuylkill Center, <http://www.schuylkillcenter.org/art/> (accessed October 2012).

Figure 32: Olafur Eliasson, *Waterfall*, 2004, steel, pump, water, 11 x 9 x 7 (h) m. Image sourced from Kunstonline, "Olafur Eliasson - Minding the World", Kunstonline, <http://kunstonline.dk/indhold/eliasson.php4> (accessed October 2012).

Figure 33: Dean Chatwin, *Catchment* (detail), 2008, corrugated roofing iron, metal guttering, steel, site-specific installation.

## Chapter 4

Figure 1: Image of leaves blocking a suburban gutter and causing water to flow across a road.

Figure 2: *Diversion* (installation detail), 2009, PVC pipe, house, site-specific installation.

Figure 3: Dean Chatwin, *Diversion*, 2009, 2-channel looped digital video projection, production still.

Figure 4: Olafur Eliasson, *Erosion*, 1997, water, documentation of intervention. Image sourced from Eliasson, Olafur, "Erosion", Olafur Eliasson, [http://www.olafureliasson.net/works/erosion\\_4.html](http://www.olafureliasson.net/works/erosion_4.html) (accessed August 2012).

Figure 5: Dean Chatwin, *Every Drop Counts*, 2009, Letterbox, Stainless steel, hose, plants, 35 x 185 x 105 (h) cm.

Figure 6: Buster Simpson, *Beckoning Cistern*, 2003, painted aluminium, stainless steel, 180 x180 x 1080 (h) cm. Image sourced from Environment News Service, "Low Impact Development Ordered for Puget Sound Cities, Large and Small", Environment News Service, <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/feb2009/2009-02-16-094.asp>Environment (accessed November 2012).

Figure 7: *Reflection*, 2-channel digital projection (image pair from looped sequence), production still, 2008–2012.

Figure 8: Uleles, *Flow City*, 1983-1991, Mixed media drawing showing plan and video camera angles. Image sourced from Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, "Mierle Laderman Ukeles", Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, [http://avant-gardians.com/ukeles/uke\\_pop1.html](http://avant-gardians.com/ukeles/uke_pop1.html) (accessed November 2012).

Figure 9: Map of the catchment area used to supply Hobart's drinking water. Image sourced from Andy Crawford, Catchment and Environmental Services Coordinator Southern Water, February 2010.

Figure 10: Image of Deciduous Beech. Image sourced from Parks and Wildlife Service Tasmania, "Deciduous beech, or Fagus, *Nothofagus gunnii*", Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment, <http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/index.aspx?base=3244> (accessed November 2012).

Figure 11: Image of Lake Pedder prior to flooding. Image sourced from Wikipedia, "Lake Pedder", Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake\\_Pedder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Pedder) (accessed November 2012).

Figure 12: Dean Chatwin, *Connection*, 2010, 2-channel looped digital video projection, silent, production still.

Figure 13: Dean Chatwin, *Roof Garden* (detail), 2008-2011, timber, soil, plants, site-specific installation.

Figure 14: Dean Chatwin, *Roof Garden* (detail), 2008-2011, timber, soil, plants, site-specific installation.

Figure 15: Gordon Matta-Clark, *Office Baroque*, 1977, site-specific intervention. Image sourced from Artnet.com, "Gordan Matta-Clark", Artnet Worldwide Corporation, <http://www.artnet.com/artwork/426141566/424013507/gordon-matta-clark-office-baroque.html> (accessed November 2012).

Figure 16: Gregor Schneider, *Dead Haus ur*, 1985 - present, site-specific installation. Image sourced from Kittelman, Udo, "Gregor Schneider", Aloys F. Dornbracht GmbH & Co. KG, <http://www.dornbracht.com/en-GB/Culture-Projects/Search.aspx?Artist=Gregor+Schneider> (accessed November 2012).

Figure 17: David Ireland, Interior of 500 Capp St. residence. Image sourced from Socketsite, "David Ireland's 500 Capp Street: Inside And Soon To Be On The Market", Socketsite, [http://www.socketsite.com/archives/2008/01/david\\_irelands\\_500\\_capp\\_street\\_inside\\_and\\_on\\_the\\_market.html](http://www.socketsite.com/archives/2008/01/david_irelands_500_capp_street_inside_and_on_the_market.html) (accessed November 2012).

Figure 18: Dean Chatwin, *Helping Hand*, 2010, 2-channel looped digital video projection, silent, production still.

Figure 19: Hundertwasser, *The Five Skins of Man*, 1998, ink drawing, 29.7 x 20.9 cm. Image sourced from Baston, Pete, "Art and Connections: Hundertwasser's District Heating Plant", IDEAS business technology integration, <http://www.ideapete.com/Hundertwasser.html> (accessed November 2012).

Figure 20: Hundertwasser, *First Draft of Tree Tenants*, 1973, ink and watercolour on paper, 33 x 21 cm. Image sourced from whycontrol, "Fruit Map Project", tumblr, <http://fruitmapproject.tumblr.com/> (accessed November 2012).

Figure 21: Image of *Tree Tenant* in the Hundertwasser designed Waldspirale, Darmstadt. Image sourced from ewass, "Heading north for our art", Troy Wass <http://www.addressingtheworld.info/troy/euroblog/archives/2006/06/> (accessed November 2012).

Figure 22: Detail of rope connecting door to tree branch in *Helping Hand*.

Figure 23: Mark Dion, *One Meter of Jungle*, 1992, jungle floor, debris, 100 x 100 cm. Image sourced from Vanden Eynde, Maarten, "Genetologic Research", Maarten Vanden Eynde, <http://www.genetologisch-onderzoek.nl/index.php/598/beeldende-kunst/> (accessed November 2012).

Figure 24: Lynne Hull, *Windmill to Raptor Roost*, 2000, windmill stand, timber, 270 x 180 x 840 (h) cm. Image sourced from Hull, Lynne, "Eco-art", Lynne Hull, <http://eco-art.org/> (accessed November 2012).

Figure 25: Hubert Duprat, *Aquatic caddis fly larva with case*, 1980-1996, caddis fly larva, gold, semi-precious stone, dimensions variable. Image sourced from Cabinet Magazine, "Hubert Duprat", Cabinet Magazine, <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/25/duprat.php> (accessed November 2012).

Figure 26: Dean Chatwin, *Plot*, 2012, 4-channel looped digital projection of still images, silent, production still.

Figure 27: 'Bodies' and guanine (spider faeces) lying below a spider's web.

Figure 28: Mark Dion, *One Meter of Meadow* (detail), 1995.

Figure 29: Dean Chatwin, *Analogue*, 2012, 9-channel looped digital video projection, production still.

## List of submitted works, in chronological order

*Collaboration*, 2007,

PVC pipe, poplar tree, site-specific installation

*Rhizome*, 2008,

PVC pipe, willow branch, site-specific installation

*Stick-out* (construction 1), 2008,

dressed casuarina timber, screws, site-specific installation, 165 x 95 x 160 (h) cm

*Stick-out* (construction 2), 2008,

dressed casuarina timber, screws, site-specific installation, 155 x 160 x 215 (h) cm

*Welcome*, 2008,

casuarina needles (phyllodes), site-specific installation, 180 x 180 x 25 (h) cm

*Catchment*, 2008,

salvaged corrugated roofing iron, metal guttering, steel, site-specific installation

*Diversion*, 2009,

2-channel looped digital video projection with audio, 9:48 mins

*Reflection*, 2008 - 2012,

2-channel looped digital projection of still images, silent, 13:54 mins

*Helping Hand*, 2010,

2-channel looped digital video projection, silent, 11:59 mins

*Plot*, 2012,

4-channel looped digital projection of still images, silent, 5:02 mins

*Analogue*, 2012,

9-channel looped digital video projection with audio, 10:06 mins

## **DVD contents**

*Diversion*, 2009,

2-channel looped digital video projection with audio, 9:48 mins

*Reflection*, 2008-2012,

2-channel looped digital projection of still images, silent, 13:54 mins

*Helping Hand*, 2010,

2-channel looped digital video projection, silent, 11:59 mins

*Plot*, 2012,

4-channel looped digital projection of still images, silent, 5:02 mins

*Analogue*, 2012,

9-channel looped digital video projection with audio, 10:06 mins

## **Research activities**

### **Selected group exhibitions**

2011 *Bush Fire* exhibited in *Benchmarking Birchs Bay*, Birchs Bay, Tasmania.  
Curator: Wendy Edwards.

2009 *Catchment* exhibited in *Benchmarking Birchs Bay*, Birchs Bay, Tasmania.  
Curator: Wendy Edwards.

2009 *Propagate* exhibited in *Tread Lightly Festival*, Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens, Hobart, Tasmania.

2009 *Resolution* exhibited in *City of Hobart Art Prize*, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, Tasmania. Curator: Jane Stewart.

2008 *Plantation* exhibited in *Geometric Nature*, Devonport Regional Gallery, Devonport, Tasmania. Curator: Lucy Hawthorne.

2008 *It Won't Grow...* exhibited in *Companion Planting*, CAST gallery, Hobart, Tasmania. Curator: Jack Robbins.

2008 *Stick-out* (construction 1), *Stick-out* (construction 2), *Welcome* exhibited in *Ephemeral Art at the Invisible Lodge*, Friendly Beaches Lodge, Friendly Beaches, Tasmania. Curators: Dick Bett (AM), David Handley, Peter Timms.

2008 *Rhizome* exhibited in *Mountain Festival Sculpture Trail*, Hobart, Tasmania.  
Curator: Sean Kelly.

### **Solo exhibitions**

2007 Collaboration exhibited at Entrepôt Gallery, Tasmanian School of Art, Hobart, Tasmania.

### **Public art commissions**

2010 *Untitled*, proposal short listed for the Hobart City Council Artbike bike rack initiative.